

Hwange's Elephant Massacre

There has been so much in the news during the week about the death of at least 69 elephants in Hwange National Park after being poisoned with cyanide. The cyanide had been mixed with salt and placed near a waterhole. The poachers have been arrested and are now in cells awaiting trial. According to one report they were given the cyanide by a South African businessman.

A big delegation of Ministers from the Zimbabwe government went to take a look at the damage. They all agreed that, if this type of incident is to be stopped, the villagers living around the park have to benefit from it. They also called for stiffer penalties for poachers.

From Wildlife News:

A South African businessman is believed to be behind the Hwange elephant poisonings. ... Police named him only as Ishmael and that he used a Chivu farmer and ivory buyer Farai Chitsa to distribute stocks of cyanide to local people in Pelandaba and Pumula areas of Tsholotsho. ...

Chitsa was arrested when his truck became stuck in sands while collecting tusks from poachers. Two brothers - Sipho and Misheck Mafu - have also been arrested and have provided police and wildlife investigators with wide-ranging information.

Police revealed that the poachers would mix up a combination of cyanide, salt and water. This would then be poured onto salt licks at watering holes known to be frequented by elephants. At other watering holes the poachers would dig holes and place containers containing the deadly mixture into the holes.

The technique was so effective at killing elephants that when the poachers took police to the sites that had been contaminated there were bodies of elephants with small tusks still intact because it wasn't worth the effort to take the tusks. The poachers were being paid as little as \$700 for 9 tusks.

It was not just elephants that were killed by the cyanide but a wide range of other animals carcasses were found including buffalo, lions, vultures and jackals. ...

Police Assistant Commissioner Micheck Mabunda is also calling for the establishment of aircraft patrols in the Hwange National Park. He notes that poachers in neighbouring Botswana will quickly disperse when their aircraft patrol flies overhead. However when those poachers enter Zimbabwe there is no threat of being discovered. He suggests that Pandamatenga Border Post would be an ideal location to base an air based patrol from.