

Hidden killers of Zimbabwe game



POACHER'S snare held this old bull buffalo for about three days until game scouts found it. Warden Mike Bromwich was forced to shoot it.



A DEADLY strip of thick bush stretching some 58 km along the Mozambique border is slowly killing off many unwitting wild animals which stray across it.

For in the area are literally hundreds of anti-personnel mines and booby-traps laid at the end of 1977 to prevent incursions.

From the air heaps of sun-bleached bones can be seen dotted around in the dense bush. On the ground "the place stinks of death, wrecks of rotting flesh", says Mr Mike Bromwich, now based at Matetsi but previously warden of the Mahalautu section of the Gona-re-zhou National Park in the south-east of Zimbabwe.

BLASTED

During the past two years about 100 animals have been found dead or wounded in the park after stepping on mines or being blasted by booby traps.

"If we have found 100, then goodness knows how many have been killed or injured on the other

side of the fence," he said.

When an animal such as an elephant stands on a mine it is seldom killed outright—a foot or chunk of flesh is blown out and becomes gangrenous and the animal dies after several weeks of suffering.

In 1978 one elephant stood on 13 AP mines and was still alive when National Parks found it and put it out of its misery.

Another bull which entered the field was found 120 km away near Chipinda Pools—badly injured but still alive.

VARIES

The minefield runs from Magumi Pan near the Maputo railway line to the Limpopo, and varies from 200 m to 3 km in width.

Where the Gona-re-zhou National Park's boundary ends, there is a corridor which is supposed to be clear of game. However, the boundary fence has been broken in several places enabling animals to wander freely up to the minefield's double fence.

These two fences are constantly being broken although maintenance is done frequently.

Another minefield, running parallel to the first one, was laid in October 1978 as the war intensified.

"Both minefields were set up in the interest of national security and we are not blaming anyone. We are now trying to do something about clearing it and making it safe for both humans and game," said Mr Bromwich.

About 80 percent of the mines and traps could be cleared if army engineers went into the area, but the task seems almost impossible.

Although the fields were designed on a set pattern, the mines will have moved from washing by down-pours.

BEST METHOD

"The bush is so dense and so well booby-trapped that by moving through they would be taking their lives in their hands.

"The best method would be to build a very strong game fence around the entire area, but this would cost us about \$70 000. We just haven't the funds.

"Tribesmen previously living in the protected villages have tried to get back into the areas which is home to them, but cannot.

"As long as the minefield exists in this state tourists are in danger. Any wounded animal becomes crazy with pain and could attack anything it sees, such as a tourist's car, without being provoked.

"If we had enough money to clear the minefield we would hold some of the country's biggest tuskers which are great attractions for tourists. Many have tusks each weighing 54 kg.

"Unfortunately, these are the elephants which are wandering into the minefields. Practically all the elephants found have been bulls as they wander much more than do the cows."

About 20 pairs of tusks have been stolen from the minefields during the past two years.

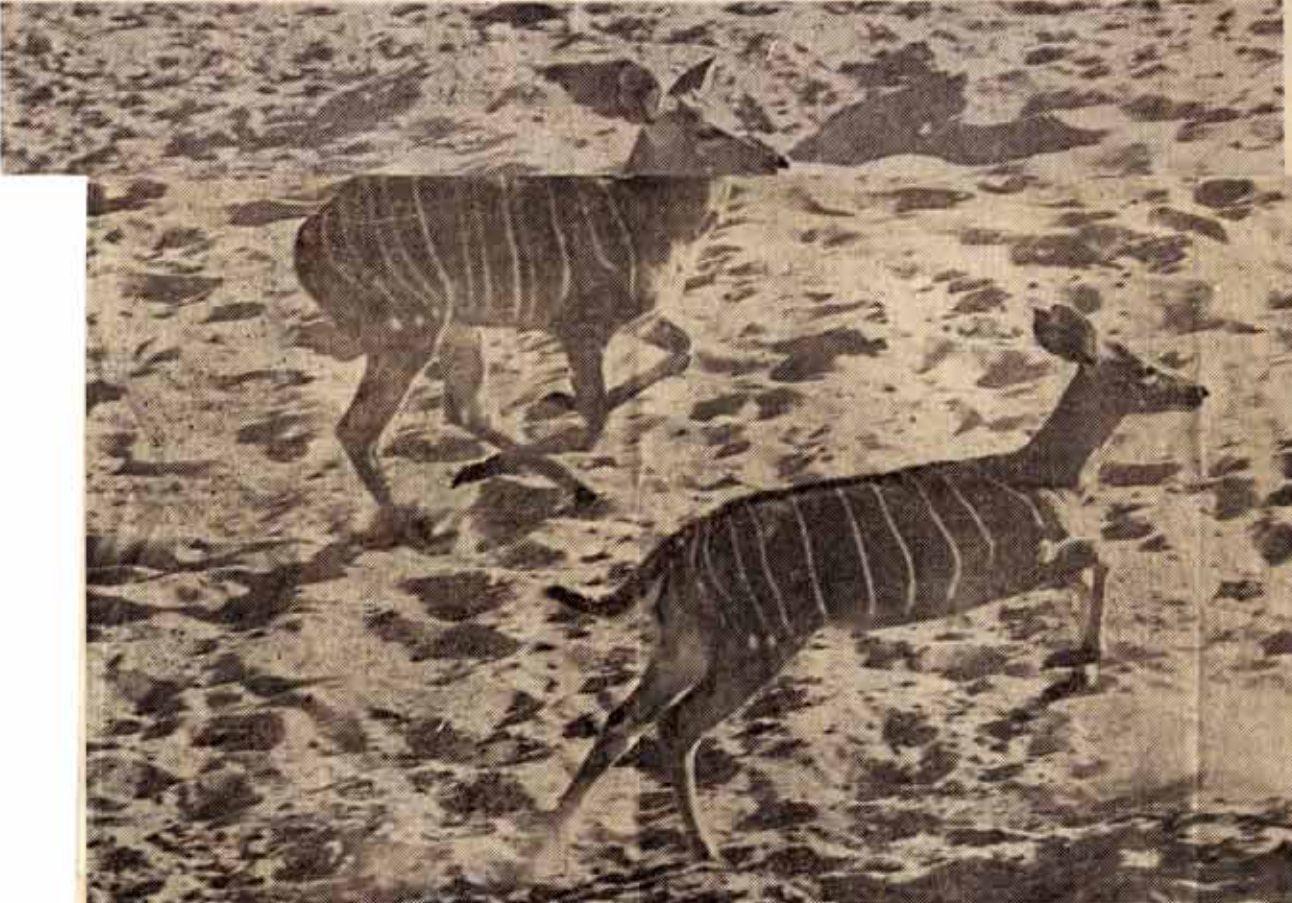
Many carcasses have been found on water courses or in dams. The most recent casualty, a buffalo, was found last Sunday half submerged in a pan.

It had died from shrapnel wounds.

They usually head towards water to ease the burning pain. Some knock themselves to death against trees.

FLIGHT

AN unusual sight . . . two female nyalas flee from a vehicle as it nears a riverbed in the Gona-re-zhou national park.



WANTON SLAUGHTER IN NATIONAL PARKS

A SHORT burst of rifle fire. The scream of a wounded animal as it crumples to the ground and lies still.

Silence shrouds the bushveld. A poacher steps out of hiding, chops off the animal's tail to use as a fly whisk, then leaves.

No meat, skin or anything useful is taken from the animal which joins the many killed this way or by snares set in the 2 000 sq km Gona-re-zhou

not hungry. They cannot cope with the abundance of food.

Poaching is rife throughout the park, but particularly near the Mozambique border where \$10 000 worth of carcasses, including skin and tusks, were found over a period of two days.

An equal number could be crawling around the

among those shot solely for their tails.

Although poaching has continued almost since the park opened it has become considerably worse since independence about a month ago, according to Mr Dave Scammell, warden with National Parks.

Their methods are cruel and lethal. "We know for a fact AK rifles are being used as are snare traps. Many poachers carry

Parks' game scouts and some have appeared before the court, only to return to their ways after being released.

In a recent case 17 fish poachers were caught and taken to court. They were fined \$15 each.

"That hardly being a deterrent, they return to their poaching.

"We have a serious problem with poaching. It is a manpower and massive

political control.

"The law gives us the right to shoot poachers if necessary. We would do it if we had the full approval of the present Government who is aware of the problem. We hope to have a statement soon."

Many poachers come from Mozambique. They cross the border, shoot whatever they feel like

Others possibly come from the Ndeu, Matibi and Sengwe Tribal Trust Lands and from the Gona-kudzingwa Purchase Area surrounding the park.

The bulk of the poaching is done about 100 km down from the Chipinda Pools National Parks headquarters at the junction of the Sabi and Lundi rivers.

Traditional fishing methods are used mainly. In the Sabi-Lundi junction a fish catch of 38 kg (worth \$65) a night is no problem.

"Game scouts are continually being sent out to badly affected areas. We will do everything within our power to stamp out the menace," said Mr Scammell.

Threatening messages from poachers have been sent to National Parks members. Some staff have been shot at.

National Parks are not the only ones with poaching problems. A farmer near Chiredzi said poaching had always been pre-

valent but was under control until about a month ago.

"Now the situation is out of control. Fines should be far stiffer than at present. Until there is some sort of Government control, we are wasting our time endlessly trying to stop them. After a few days in jail they return to their evil deeds," he said.

"I suppose now that poachers have an easy method of killing animals they become blasé about it and shoot even though they don't need the skins or tusks."

Although the 2 000 sq km Gona-re-zhou National Park has tremendous tourist potential, it faces many serious problems which have to be solved before anyone can visit the area.

The park also has a large number of former guerrillas still in Assembly Point Hotel at Chipinda Pools.

Gona-re-zhou was established as a National Park in 1963 and opened to tourists in 1968. It was never extensively developed and the roads were never good, but rest camps at Malapati, Mahalautu and Chipinda Pools and camping grounds were available. It was closed in 1975 as the war intensified.

Gona-re-zhou is bordered in the north by the Sabi River and in the south by the Nuanetsi River. The east and south-east boundary is the Mozambique border.



THE red and white Chilojo Cliffs overlooking the Lundi River in the Gona-re-zhou National Park could become one of the park's most beautiful tourist attractions.

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