

Mozambique's civil war threatens wildlife

City Press CP Correspondent 17-7-88

MNR bandits roam protected sanctuaries slaughtering animals for hides and tusks

untouched by the war.

This is the Barazuto Archipelago, off the Inhambane coast, which covers 80 sqkm. The main purpose of this marine park is for the protection of turtles.

Five other game reserves are scattered across the country and cover a total of 19 700 sqkm. Limited hunting areas cover 56 600 sqkm.

Although it has a vast area under its responsibility, the Wildlife Conservation Department only has 60 staff members, most of whom are untrained and entered the sector after Mozambique's independence in 1975.

Many of those who worked with wildlife during the colonial period, left the country at independence.

Currently, the Mozambican wildlife authorities are trying to benefit from the experience of neighbouring countries like Tanzania and Zimbabwe. This includes a study of their wildlife.

Mozambique's wildlife could be a valuable source of foreign exchange, if used properly for tourist purposes.

But ordinary wildlife viewing was stopped in 1981 and safari hunting in 1983, due to the military situation.

— Ano

Mozambique's total land surface.

But most parks and reserves can no longer function because of the war.

The MNR roams through areas set aside for wildlife, and slaughters creatures such as elephants and zebras — the former for their ivory, the latter for their skins.

Zolho estimates the total elephant population in Mozambique at 16 000, which represents a decline of about 70 percent in less than a decade. In 1979, the number was calculated at 54 800.

But there are still a fair number of elephants left in Mozambique — while other species are on the way to extinction.

It is increasingly rare for the Wildlife Conservation Department to receive information on cheetahs, ostriches or black rhino — not only because of poaching — but because of the destruction of their habitat.

A small number of white rhino used

to live in the Maputo Game Reserve near Mozambique's border with Natal, but the species has now been hunted to extinction in Mozambique. The last time one was sighted was in 1985.

It is not only the MNR which illegally hunt Mozambique's wildlife. In the north and northwest of the country, poachers come across the border to hunt Mozambican wildlife.

Zolho says in the north western province of Tete, four Zimbabwean poachers were recently arrested.

In this part of the country, Zimbabwean and Zambian poachers go to extreme lengths, even poisoning waterholes, to kill the animals they want.

Tanzanian and Somali poachers cross the river Rovuma to enter the northern Mozambican province which contains the largest game reserve in the country.

Zolho says in this region, poachers

co-opt local people with promises of consumer goods in exchange for trophies, skins and ivory.

He denies there are Mozambicans involved in commercial smuggling.

Zolho argues that, in general, Mozambican peasants only hunt wildlife for their own consumption, or to protect their homes and crops.

Understandably, peasant farmers think elephants rampaging in their maize fields are oversize vermin.

Mozambique has four national parks. The most famous is Gorongosa in the central province of Sofala, that covers 3 770 sqkm.

The Zinave and Banhine parks — in the southern province of Inhambane and Gaza — cover 5 000 and 7 000 sqkm.

At the moment, it is out of the question to visit any of these parks because of MNR banditry, especially in the Gorongosa area.

The fourth national park has been

In a small Ministry of Agriculture office in Mozambique's Heroes Square in Maputo Roberto Zolho and Sanso Bonito, try to follow what is happening to Mozambique's wildlife in the midst of a war that spares neither man nor beast.

Zolho, head of the Ministry's Wildlife Conservation Department, declares categorically "we have no control over the areas set aside for wildlife".

He blames the Department's lack of control on MNR bandits and recognises sadly that he and his colleague can only operate with vague estimates and unconfirmed information.

Currently, the Department is limited to issuing quotas of animals that can be killed annually in each province, in an attempt to bring order to a chaotic situation.

The Department should also complete information on the numbers of rare or endangered species in Mozambique.

This would be a difficult task even under peaceful conditions, since wildlife areas in the country are vast, covering some 96 700 sqkm — about 12 percent of