

Society suspects heavy poaching in Gonarezhou

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Sunday Mail Reporter
THERE are widespread reports of heavy elephant poaching in Gonarezhou, the country's second largest national park, according to Zimbabwe Wildlife, the official magazine of the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe.

In its December issue, the magazine cites the fate of a "famous" elephant with "immense" tusks thought to weigh more than 50 kg and named Kabakwe, which the magazine says has disappeared.

"He may have been killed by poachers, or he may have died naturally — either way, his ivory has not been recovered, and some people have linked his probable death with the appearance of the advertisement in South Africa, late in 1985, for two tusks of similar weight," says the magazine.

It says more recently a captured poacher was said to have located 13 until then unknown rhino carcasses "to add to the 25 already known to have been killed" by September last year.

Another source was said to have seen several elephant carcasses "but few live elephant" in the Runde region of the park.

"The situation is made more difficult by the present closure of Gonarezhou because of security operations against MNR bandits. Perhaps inevitably in the circumstances, the stories are long on speculation, but rather short on fact," says the magazine.

It continues: "Nevertheless, it does appear that something very unpleasant may have been happening in Gonarezhou; that the park

has lost a substantial number of its renowned big tusk-ers, and many of its rhinos as well."

A member of the Wildlife Society who would not be identified said he could not say how many elephants or rhino had been lost through poaching in the park. But it was his rough estimate that elephants had been reduced from "several thousand" to between 2 000 and 3 000.

"There is sufficient evidence to show that something nasty is happening in Gonarezhou and we would be delighted to be proved wrong," he said.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Novosti Press Agency says Angolan bandit leader Jonas Savimbi has decimated Angola's elephant population to raise money to pay for the arms he gets from his Western allies.

It says a museum in George, a city in the southwest of South Africa, has a model of a sub-machine gun made of ivory presented to President Pieter Botha by Savimbi "as a manifestation of inseparable friendship".

Savimbi is quoted as saying last year that Unita delivered ivory to South Africa as payment for lavish military and financial assistance. French reports say as many as 360 animals are killed every day.

According to the Angolan news agency, Angop, Unita bandits have exterminated about 100 000 elephants in the last 10 years. South Africa ignores international restrictions on trade in ivory. According to data, that country has about 9 000 elephants but it exports 16 000 tusks to France every year.

Obs. The MNR may have been using Gonarezhou as a rear base (mainly for water supply), for attacks on the Cahora Bassa power lines, which run along the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border in a very dry area. (MHN).