

# Riding out to save the rhino

Project Rhino Association has revived a horse unit in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi to catch poachers

NOKUTHULA KHANYILE

THE Project Rhino Association has revived a horse unit in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi game reserve to snare poachers and counter the slaughtering of rhinos.

The Ezemvelo anti-poaching horse unit was revived last year with the assistance of Californian artist Karrie Hovey, when she was on a rhino art tour in Mtubatuba in 2015. Hovey raised funds through her art sales and donated them to non-governmental organisation 12 Hours which, together with Project Rhino, facilitated the revival of the unit.

Global conservation has also donated money to sustain the horse unit.

Project Rhino partner Grant Fowlds said the unit currently has seven horses being used for patrols.

“Most of the Ezemvelo horse sections closed down due to various reasons. One was that they were not cost effective, they were getting old and that there was no budget,” said Fowlds.

He said the existing horse unit soldiered on despite it being an outpost stable. “It is a functional unit which is run very effectively. We are hoping that this will be a catalyst to bring in the other three horse units which are sitting dormant because of various reasons.

“We have been able to reduce poaching with the presence of these horses.”

Section ranger and head of the horse unit Sibonelo Zulu said their section was about 16 000 hectares.

“I have 18 fit rangers but I’ve got only five guys who I have nominated to be horse riders in this camp because it is a big section compared to the other parts of Hluhluwe.

“We have big areas that we need to cover and without horses we can’t do it. It is much easier to do patrols on horses,” he added.

Zulu said rangers do patrols every day.

“In my section I have only lost two rhinos since the unit was re-established. We are now covering a wider area because of the horses. Although it’s very dangerous for us, it is proving to be very effective.”

He said the “danger” he was referring to was the possibility of encountering dangerous wildlife while on horseback, such as lions. Zulu said the plan was to revive more horse stables so the unit can be expanded within the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi game reserve.

“We are fixing the stables and trying to get sponsorship. We want to lose less rhino this year compared to 2017.”

He believes the horses can be a good tool against poachers because they are fast-moving and can step quietly through the bush. The area near the fence is dominated by mopani/bushwillow veld. “One can cover a larger distance than on foot and get much closer to wildlife for monitoring purposes. Horses have excellent senses and they are very alert,” said Zulu.

Rhino poaching has reached epidemic proportions with around 1 200 rhino being killed in 2014 and 2015 in South Africa alone. KwaZulu-Natal lost over 200 rhinos in 2017, compared to 162 in 2016.

• nokuthula.khanyile@media24.com



Piles of rhino skulls at Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve. PHOTOS: IAN CARBUTT



Phillie Ngcamu is all smiles with her horse Nkalakatha at Hluhluwe Imfolozi Game Reserve.



Phelelani Ntombela leads his horse out of the stables.



ABOVE, LEFT: Head of the anti-poaching horse unit Sibonelo Zulu (centre) with his team (from left) Sensile Shoji, Phelelani Ntombela, Bonginkosi Langa and Phillie Ngcamu. ABOVE, RIGHT: Anti-poaching horse unit members patrolling the fence at Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Reserve



## THERON IN FILM ABOUT AILES

CAPE TOWN — Back in 2016 Fox News chairperson and CEO Roger Ailes was accused of sexual harassment and misconduct by several female journalists and anchors at the conservative network and later resigned.

Ailes died in May 2017. Fast forward to May 2018 when *The Hollywood Reporter* says that South African actress Charlize Theron and film director Jay Roach are joining forces to bring Ailes’ downfall to the big screen.

Theron is set to star as one of Ailes’ accusers, TV anchor Megyn Kelly, in the unnamed project, as well as produce it.

— Channel24 Movies.

## FILTH STAINING THE TAJ MAHAL

AGRA — India’s white-marble Taj Mahal is turning yellow and green as the 17th century mausoleum weathers filthy air in the world’s eighth-most polluted city.

The Taj Mahal flanks a garbage-strewn river and is often enveloped by dust and smog from belching smokestacks and vehicles in the northern city of Agra, an environmental lawyer told India’s Supreme Court.

The court criticised the government for not doing enough to preserve the monument.

There was no comment from government officials.

— Reuters.

## Palestine wants ICC probe into claims of Israeli human rights abuses

THE HAGUE — Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki asked prosecutors at the International Criminal Court (ICC) yesterday to launch a full investigation into accusations of Israeli human rights abuses on Palestinian territory, saying evidence was “insurmountable”.

Maliki submitted a so-called “referral”, giving the prosecutor at the Hague-based court the legal basis to move beyond a preliminary inquiry started in January 2015.

The ICC has the authority to hear cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity committed on the territory of the 123 countries that have signed up to it. Israel has not joined the court, but because the Palestinians have, Israelis could be targeted for crimes committed on Palestinian lands.

Israel rejected yesterday’s move as “legally invalid”, saying the court lacks jurisdiction because the Palestinian Authority is not a state and Israel abides by international law.

**“The Palestinians continue to exploit the [International Criminal] court for political purposes, rather than work towards resuming the peace process with Israel.”**

“The Palestinians continue to exploit the court for political purposes, rather than work towards resuming the peace process with Israel,” the Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

“It is absurd that the Palestinian actions vis-à-vis the court come at a time when the Palestinians continue to incite to acts of terrorism,” it said.

The court’s prosecutors launched an initial investigation into allegations against Israel when the Palestinians first joined the court in 2015. Yesterday’s referral allows that investigation to proceed to the next stage of a full investigation, without waiting for a judge to give approval.

Harvard legal expert Alex Whiting, a former ICC prosecutor, said on Twitter that the referral “has a real effect ... it is much harder for the office of the prosecutor to stay in the preliminary investigation phase for years”.

Maliki said the request would give prosecutors the authority to investigate alleged crimes starting in 2014 and beyond, including last week’s deaths during protests in Gaza.

“We believe there is ample and insurmountable evidence to that effect and we believe that proceeding with an investigation is the right and needed course of action,” he said.

The decision by the Palestinians to join the court was opposed by major powers, who feared it could damage chances for peace talks.

“Through judicial referral we want ... the office of the prosecutor to open without delay an investigation into all crimes,” he told journalists after meeting with chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda. “Further delaying justice for Palestinian victims is also tantamount to denial of justice.”

The ICC is a court of last resort, only stepping in when a state is unwilling or unable to investigate crimes on its territory. — Reuters.

## SEX ABUSE: BISHOP GUILTY

MELBOURNE — An Australian archbishop was found guilty yesterday of concealing child sex abuse by a priest, which Australian media said made him the most senior Catholic in the world to be convicted on such a charge.

Philip Wilson, the archbishop of Adelaide and a former president of the Catholic Church’s top body in Australia, is expected to be sentenced in June.

Wilson was accused of covering up a serious indictable offence by another priest, James Fletcher, after being told about it in 1976 when he was an assistant parish priest in the state of New South Wales. — Reuters.

## 50 ATHLETES MISSING IN OZ

SYDNEY — Australian authorities are searching for 50 athletes and officials missing a month after the Commonwealth Games ended in the host city of the Gold Coast, while another 190 are seeking asylum, the country’s home affairs minister said yesterday.

Minister Peter Dutton told reporters an operation had been organised to find the 50 people and “take them into immigration detention and eventually to deport them”. He said another 190 people had sought protection visas, a class of visa in Australia assigned to refugees. — Reuters.

## Nando’s rejects Conservative Party’s member discount card proposal

A PLAN by the United Kingdom’s Conservative Party to lure new young members with Nando’s discount cards failed after the South African chain refused to have any association with the proposals.

The Conservatives — who are struggling to match Labour’s youth appeal and take-up in new membership — were considering bolstering the appeal of its party subscription by rolling out a discount card.

But on Monday, a Nando’s spokesperson said: “Nando’s has no political affiliations as a brand and no political discount card exists.”

While distancing themselves from the possibility of a discount card for the Conservatives, the spokesperson added that they would continue to offer discounts for health services staff and police.

“We have a Nando’s loyalty card and standard gift cards that anyone can use, and we offer a 20% discount to police, fire services, ambulance service and NHS [National Health Service] staff,” the spokesperson added.

Referencing the famous sauce served at Nando’s restaurants, a spokesperson for the Labour party said on Monday: “The desperate Tories [Conservative Party] offering a Nando’s discount scheme was always a peri-peri stupid idea.”

The card — described over the weekend by a senior party source as a “very real possibility” — would have

included cut-price offers on food and clothes, as well as money off at restaurants like Nando’s, the *Times* reported.

“These are early discussions — we don’t know how many businesses would want to take part, but we’re keen to give members more in return for their membership,” they added.

**“The desperate Tories [Conservative Party] offering a Nando’s discount scheme [to lure new young members] was always a peri-peri stupid idea.”**