

# MNR cashes in on rhino and elephant poaching

## H Herald Reporter

MNR bandits have been poaching elephant, rhino and other game in the Gonarezhou National Park in south-eastern Zimbabwe for several years to finance their destabilisation efforts in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean sources have confirmed information given to The Weekly Mail of South Africa that bandits have been slaughtering Zimbabwean elephant and rhino and selling the ivory and horn to South Africans. The Mail has an on-going investigation into private South African funding of the bandit operations and has exposed many such channels.

The bandits have not had it all their own way since they started poaching in Gonarezhou early in 1986. Several have been killed by patrols from the Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management or the Zi-

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mbabwe National Army. Others have been arrested. Two parks men have been shot, although it is not known who the murderers were.

It is not known precisely how many elephant and other game have been killed by bandit poachers. There have been reports of dozens of elephant carcasses seen without tusks and most of these are the result of bandit poachers.

At one time, those making the reports thought that Zimbabwean troops were responsible. But Zimbabweans would find it difficult to market ivory or rhino horn, at least in quantity.

South Africa is notorious for exporting a good deal more ivory than is produced in that country. American investigators uncovered, a little while back, evidence showing that vast numbers of Angolan elephant were

being slaughtered and the ivory channelled through South Africa for Unita funds.

South Africa definitely has the middlemen with the contacts for illegal ivory exports.

The presence of bandit poachers in Gonarezhou has led to a rise in poaching by others, but only since the beginning of last year, according to contacts. However the bandit presence makes normal anti-poaching work difficult.

According to sources, the bandit gangs started the commercial slaughter of rhino and elephant early in 1986.

One of the most bizarre poaching crimes on record occurred in April that year, said one source, when a bandit collaborator, Josia Chauke of Mozambique, killed a buffalo, poisoned the meat and so killed 17 vultures. He wanted the beaks for witchcraft. He was ar-

rested and charged.

In July 1986 two Mozambicans with SKS rifles were arrested. They said they were armed by MNR bandits. On September 19 the next year the army killed a number of poachers believed to be bandits.

Meanwhile, National Parks was becoming worried about the difficulty of protecting rhino and elephant. In August 1988 moved 26 to the Zambezi Valley.

In February last year two Mozambican poachers, believed to be bandits, were shot by parks staff and a rifle recovered. Two more were killed, a third captured and two AK47 rifles and three rhino horns recovered in July last year.

Gonarezhou, one of Zimbabwe's prime wilderness areas, has been closed to visitors for some time because of the presence of poachers and bandits.