

MNR poaching rhino

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

Bandits, according to Zimbabwean sources, have confirmed information given to the Weekly Mail of South Africa that bandits have been killing local elephants 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 way since they started poaching in Gona-re-zhou early in 1986. Several have been killed by patrols from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management or the Zimbabwe National Army. Others have been arrested. Two Parks men have been shot, although it is not known who the killers were.

It is not known precisely how many elephant and other animals have been killed by bandit poachers. There

have been reports of dozens of elephant carcasses 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 wellknown for exporting a good deal more ivory than is produced in that country. American investigators uncovered recently evidence showing that vast numbers of Angolan elephants were being slaughtered and the ivory channelled through South Africa for UNTA funds.

The presence of bandit poachers in Gona-re-zhou has led to a rise in poaching by other people, 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 bandits started the commer-

cial slaughter of rhino and elephant early in 1986, at the same time killing smaller game for the pot.

One of the most bizarre poaching crimes on record occurred in April that year, said one source, when a bandit collaborator, John Chauke of Mozambique, killed a buffalo, poisoned the meat which led to the killing of 17 vultures that ate the buffalo flesh. He wanted the beak for magical purposes. He was arrested and charged.

In July 1986 when two Mozambicans with SKS rifles were arrested, they said they were armed by MNR bandits. On September 19, the following year, the army killed a number of poachers, believed to be bandits, and a rifle recovered and two more were killed in July last year.

Gona-re-zhou, one of the country's prime wilderness areas, has been closed to visitors for some time because of the presence of poachers and bandits. — Chronicle Corr.