



U M B A B A T

13 Feb 2018

Members of the Umbabat Private Nature Reserve.

Re: **Lion Incident Friday, 9th February 2018**

The following serves as a statement from the Umbabat Private Nature Reserve (UPNR) management on the incident:

On the 9th February, at approximately 20h00 to 20h30, a male person of unknown identity, was killed by a pride of lions in the eastern extremity of the UPNR, close to the Kruger National Park (KNP) border. While Ingwelala is within the UPNR, the incident did not occur upon Ingwelala, but approximately 10 km from it. Given the infrastructure and logistical support of Ingwelala, it was used as a “Command Centre” for the initial phase of the emergency response, recovery and co-ordination operation.

The UPNR is a protected area, which requires that all people entering it, including owners and employees, and residing within the area have permits giving “Right of Access”.

Based upon the evidence on the scene, the victim was most likely a poacher, since a heavy calibre firearm, appropriate ammunition, travel rations of foreign description and clothing of unknown origin were recovered. Neither, a form of identity, nor travel documents, nor firearm licence nor any official permit authorising the victim to have been in the UPNR, was discovered.

There was evidence that the victim was not alone at the time of the incident, since 2 other sets of human tracks were observed. These tracks indicated that the companions were fleeing the scene at a very rapid pace, in a North Easterly direction. Those tracks were followed until they disappeared into the KNP, at which point the “hand over protocol” to neighbouring reserves was implemented.

At the time that UPNR management became aware, of a human being victim to a lion attack, there were several courses of emergency action which were set into motion:

1. Ingwelala Entrance Gate was established as the Command Centre;
2. All security personnel and reserve managers were notified via the UPNR Security Group;
3. The UPNR security provider was tasked to take over at the scene, together with the UPNR Warden and other senior management. The security response was advised to be exceedingly cautious, since the incident may have been an incursion by persons unknown;
4. Reserve Access Control guided emergency medical and paramedical personnel to the Command Centre, to await further instruction;
5. South African Police Services (SAPS) were advised;
6. Possible witnesses were directed towards the Command Centre for debriefing;
7. Radio communication was established between management and security providers;
8. All UPNR managers were placed on “stand-by” alert – ready to render aid.

Initially, the victim was thought to possibly be an employee of the UPNR, however this could not be verified at the time of the incident.

There was doubt expressed that the victim was an employee, since he had been wearing clothes that fellow employees did not recognise at all.

It must be said at this point, that scanty cell phone signal exists within the UPNR, and although efforts were made to account for people's whereabouts, this proved futile at the time of the incident. The speculation that, the victim was possibly a reserve employee was only dispelled early the following morning (approximately 6h30, Sat 10 Feb) once all employees had been accounted for. By that time however, the unsubstantiated rumours that an employee of the UPNR had been the victim of a lion attack, had spread to certain media, who seemed to amplify the tragic news in a slightly different angle.

Somebody unfortunately made an inaccurate statement based upon rumours, about the victim's identity, rather than reporting on the facts known at that time.

Indeed, tragically, a person had been killed by a pride of lions. But the media statement that seemed to gain more momentum was the concept that the victim was an employee of the UPNR. It is a travesty indeed, that this type of sensationalism outweighs the value of life. Rather than focussing and reporting upon facts and the tragedy of a lost human life, gain would be obtained from unsubstantiated rumours and confusion.

The matter is still under investigation by SAPS. In the interim, SAPS released a Press Statement on 11 Feb; about the unknown identity of the victim and that he was not an employee of the UPNR, and most likely a poacher.

The UPNR retains the services of a registered security provider to provide anti-poaching and security related measures. Notwithstanding, poachers who predominantly traverse on foot at night, find their way into and through the UPNR.

Without distracting from the tragedy of loss of human life, which has occurred in this incident, it is necessary to elaborate upon the reality on the ground:

The UPNR, together with its neighbours has found itself under the ever-increasing responsibility of trying to preserve fauna and flora. As well as the task of protecting it from those who see "ecological conservation zones" as places to unscrupulously, selfishly and indiscriminately exploit natural heritage.

UPNR, together with its neighbours, has lost countless rhino to poaching. But the list does not stop with rhino. Elephant, lion, vultures, pangolin and hyena are regularly targeted by poachers. Consequently extensive security measures costing millions of Rand's and an indescribable amount of counter poaching effort is put in place.

As UPNR management, we feel that we are one small part of an effort to stop a "war" against our land. In truth, this "war" needs to be fought at a national and international level and is not economically sustainable by the individual.

UPNR management would like to express grateful appreciation to all its employees, managers and staff, service providers and extended security personnel, together with paramedical support and SAPS for the exemplary manner in which they conducted themselves in their response to this tragic incident.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Lenny Willson

UPNR Chairman