

Elephant population slashed by poachers

Report reveals ivory hunting as driver of plight of 'intelligent animals'

AFRICA'S elephant population has seen the worst decline in 25 years, mainly due to poaching over the past 10 years.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) held a press conference on Sunday to launch its African Elephant Status Report.

The report is an authoritative source of knowledge about the numbers and distribution of African elephant populations across their 37 range states in sub-Saharan Africa.

It presents more than 275 new or updated estimates for individual elephant populations across Africa, with more than 180 of these arising from systematic surveys.

The report summarises – for the first time in almost a decade – elephant numbers at the continental, regional and national levels, and examines changes in population estimates at the site level.

Based on population estimates from sources – including aerial surveys and elephant dung counts – the estimates for the past year are 93 000 lower than in 2006.

However, this figure includes 18 000 from previously uncounted populations. Therefore, the real decline from estimates is considered to be closer to 111 000.

The continental total is about 415 000 elephants, although there may be an additional 117 000 to 135 000 elephants in areas not systematically surveyed.

The surge in poaching for ivory that began about a decade ago – the worst that Africa has seen since the 1970s and 1980s – has been the main driver of the decline, while habitat loss poses a serious, long-term threat to the species, said to the report.

"These new numbers reveal the truly alarming plight of the majestic elephant



FREE FOR NOW: Elephants in the Aquila Private Game Reserve in Touws River, W Cape. With more than 70 percent of the estimated African elephants, southern Africa has the largest number – about 293 000 elephants.. PICTURE: GASANT ABARDER

– one of the world's most intelligent animals and the largest terrestrial mammal alive," said IUCN director general Inger Andersen.

"It is shocking but not surprising that poaching has taken such a dramatic toll on this iconic species. This report provides

further scientific evidence of the need to scale up efforts to combat poaching."

With more than 70 percent of the estimated African elephants, southern Africa has the largest number of the species – about 293 000 elephants in systematically surveyed areas.

Although poaching has not had the same impact in southern Africa as in other areas, the region is facing the emergence of a growing poaching threat.

"Population declines have been observed in Mozambique and some areas in Zimbabwe. – ANA