



■ CAPTIVE

## Zoo 'paid exorbitant price' for elephants

LOUZEL LOMBARD

THE Johannesburg Zoo paid almost R1 million more than the market rate for its two new elephants from Inkwenkwezi Private Game Reserve in East London.

That's according to Brett Mitchell, chairperson of the Elephant Reintegration Trust, who said: "The City of Joburg's funds have been grossly overspent."

"These days, the going rate for captive elephants is around R150 000 per animal."

The sentiment was echoed by animal rights group Ban Animal Trading (BAT), which said "this kind of problematic and excessive expenditure is irregular and would be better spent on service delivery".

Neither the city council, Johannesburg Zoo or Inkwenkwezi were willing to state whether the elephants were originally wild-caught or captive-bred.

An initial statement by the zoo stating "a thorough and lengthy process" confirmed that "the elephants are captive-bred" was later altered to read that "the elephants are captive-managed".

The elephants were sold to Inkwenkwezi after being caught in the wild and put through a captive management programme, which does not suit them for close confinement in a dangerous moated enclosure.

The NSPCA questioned the zoo's ability to manage elephants as the existing elephant, Lammie, was sedated on arrival of the two new companion elephants.

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Excessive expenditure would be better spent on service delivery

Animal rights group  
BAN ANIMAL TRADING (BAT)

Despite zoo claims that Lammie "responded positively" to the arrival of the elephants, a 22-year-old male named Ramadiba and a 19-year-old female named Mopani, photographs taken at the zoo showed her with a red tranquilliser dart hanging from her hindquarters on the day of their arrival.

In an official statement, the NSPCA enquired about the necessity, methods and reasons to dart Lammie. "Was she darted to keep her calm during the press conference, or does the Johannesburg Zoo not have suitable facilities to manage an introduction without darting?" they asked.

"The type of dart used also appears that it may have been a barbed dart, which should not be used on pachyderms," the NSPCA said.

According to Mitchell, the zoo's claim of an enclosure of 1.5 hectares for the elephants is also vastly overstated as the actual living area where Lammie lives and moves on a day-to-day basis only adds up to about 0.55 ha.

He said the area was inadequate for the elephants.

When asked about the size of the enclosure and whether it had undergone any upgrades since the death of Lammie's initial partner Kinkel, Joburg Zoo spokesperson Jenny Moodley refused to comment.

International elephant experts have reached out to the zoo with assistance in securing Lammie's wellbeing, but these offers were ignored.

Instead, says EMS Foundation director Michele Pickover, the zoo has now chosen to "wed themselves to the elephant-back safari industry, which is coming under huge scrutiny from the general public and also from official tourism authorities like the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association".

The Humane Society International – Africa, BAT and the EMS Foundation have renewed their calls on the Joburg Zoo to release the elephants to an accredited re-wilding facility.

If size really mattered, the whale, not the shark, would rule the waters

MATSHONA DHLIWAYO  
Canadian philosopher



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### SUMMIT TO DISCUSS CANNABIS MARKET WILL HIT CAPE TOWN IN NOVEMBER

The CannaTech Summit will take place from November 24 to 26. The summit, to be held at the Lookout at the V&A Waterfront, comes as the global medical cannabis market continues to expand.

■ CONSERVATION



# Overfishing a threat to whales

Creecy halts exploratory octopus fishery in False Bay due to danger to marine life

WEEKEND ARGUS REPORTER

MINISTER of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Barbara Creecy has suspended octopus fishing, following a spate of whale entanglements around the country's ecologically sensitive coastline led to mounting public concern.

This comes after two whales (an adult Bryde's whale and a juvenile humpback whale) died in False Bay over a two-week period. Both whales died after becoming entangled in nets intended for octopus fishing.

"Our decision is taken following widespread public concern regarding recent whale entanglements in the False Bay area which has resulted in the untimely and cruel death of these magnificent creatures," Creecy said in a statement.

Her department said the suspension would remain in place until scientists completed an investigation into the entanglements.

Lesley Rochat, founder and CEO of AfriOceans Conservation Alliance said: "(That) this highly intelligent and graceful animal, which gives birth to one calf after a pregnancy of 11 months should come to our shores after travelling up to 25 000km per year only to die a slow and cruel death by drowning is devastating, and an unacceptable loss."

Rochat said the impact of octopus fishing and the resultant fatalities also had a "domino effect".

"With a recent lack of predatory great white sharks in False Bay, we have witnessed an increased number of Cape fur seals which are needing food and octopus is a valuable prey."

"The general over-fishing that has occurred in False Bay for decades,



MINISTER of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries Barbara Creecy has placed an immediate moratorium on octopus fishing to save the whales. | LESLEY ROCHAT AfriOceans Conservation Alliance

including the catching of octopus has resulted in a shortage of food for seals, which are turning to increased predations on the endangered African penguin.

"This in turn has negative impli-

cations on the already plummeting numbers of African penguins, their role within the marine ecosystems, and their contribution towards the upliftment of communities as a result of their economic value in South Afri-

can tourism."

Rochat said with this being the start of the whale season in False Bay, many more deaths through entanglements were likely to occur, unless urgent measures are taken to stop

destructive fishing practices.

The exploratory fishing for octopus was established in 2014 in False Bay, Saldanha Bay and Mossel Bay to develop economic hubs and create jobs.

■ RESEARCH

## Insight into role of African penguin in ecosystem

NICKY WILLEMSE

WHEN it comes to mealtimes, flying seabirds in South Africa are getting a little help from their diving friends, the African penguins.

Scientists working in Stony Point, Betty's Bay, near Hermanus, fixed video cameras on the backs of African penguins and the footage revealed that as these birds drive sardines and anchovies from great depths up to the surface, several flying seabird species – some of them threatened, home in to share the spoils.

This discovery has given Nelson Mandela University post-doctoral researcher Alistair McInnes and his supervisor, Professor Pierre Pistorius – who heads up the university's Marine Apex Predator Research Unit – unexpected insights into the bigger role African penguins play in the marine ecosystem.

Their findings, collected during four breeding seasons (June to August) from 2015 to 2018, appeared in the respected British journal, Royal Society Open Science on June 5.

"African penguins are listed as an endangered species as they are of serious conservation concern. We know that food shortages could be a big problem driving their decline,"



FLYING seabirds share penguins' deep-sea bounty in unusual research discovery. | SUPPLIED

said Pistorius.

Since 2004, their numbers have dropped by more than 70%.

McInnes deployed GPS loggers, time-depth recorders and video cameras on the lower backs of the penguins to determine the difficulties they face in finding food.

Pistorius said: "Going through the footage, we saw that the penguins

dived deep (around 30m to 60m) and that they forage in groups, which we already knew. But what was interesting was that they herd schools of prey up to the surface, where it is easier to corral them.

"And by doing that, they also make food available to other seabird species that can't dive to those depths, including sooty shearwaters, Cape cormor-

ants and swift terns."

These birds look out for groups of penguins at the surface – and make a beeline for them.

"Essentially, the penguins are facilitating prey capture for these other species, some of which are threatened seabird species themselves. So really, this is an important mechanism that is enabling them to get prey."

"It's the first time we've seen how the foraging behaviour of African penguins benefits other species."

Pistorius said the flying seabirds didn't necessarily follow the penguins out to sea, but were attracted to large groups of penguins at the surface.

"The more visible the penguins are, the quicker you see other seabirds coming to the scene. Their cue is the penguins rather than the prey, as they will come even when there is not a lot of prey."

McInnes deployed cameras on 20 breeding African penguins, leaving them on for two days at a time to track their foraging journey from nest to sea and back. He went through 30 hours of footage and discovered 10 different occasions where flying seabirds joined the penguins' feast.

McInnes said: "African penguins may be more significant for other seabirds in their communities than previously thought, especially when prey is pretty scarce."

The scientists hope that by researching the African penguin, they will uncover clues to help save the sea bird.

"Studying how they find and catch their prey at sea will give us insights into how to best manage their prey supplies," said McInnes.