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FEARFUL RESIDENTS

Plea for NGOs' help to remove stray elephants

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A COMMUNITY meeting attended by non-government organisations (NGOs) has resolved that a herd of about 30 elephants that escaped from a private game reserve near Ulundi last week must be removed dead or alive.

This is according to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife spokesperson Musa Mntambo, who said they have received an urgent call from the kwaMpumpula community in KwaCeza asking for assistance with the escaped elephants.

Ezemvelo said last week that several families from the area were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge with relatives, while others stayed on high alert due to the elephants roaming in the area.

Mntambo said the residents feared that they were in danger of an "imminent attack."

He said a herd of elephants had also entered the Esidakaneni area under Inkosi Ndebele, causing further distress and fear to the community.

As a result, the conservation body has deployed officials to monitor the sit-

uation to ensure the safety of residents.

Ezemvelo has also made an urgent call to all NGOs and individuals to come up with non-lethal solutions for the safe removal of the elephants from the area.

Speaking to *The Mercury* yesterday, Mntambo said the elephants pose a serious threat to residents as long as they are not inside a protected area.

"They pose a danger to the local community and change the social behaviour of the community members as they stop visiting each other at night. Kids are scared to go to schools, and they cannot even go to where their cattle graze," he said.

Mntambo said the herd had been pushed into the nearby unfenced bush. "There is an NGO which used a drone and a chopper to push them into the bush," he said.

In response to the call for assistance from NGOs, Mntambo said he was only aware of one telephone call made to Ezemvelo. "I am aware of one telephone call from someone who indicated that she knows someone who wants elephants. We shall be engaging her to see if the call is supported by facts," he said.

Mntambo appealed again for NGOs

as well as any person who may be able to keep such a large number of elephants to assist.

"During the community meeting, it was resolved that these animals must be removed from their area, dead or alive," he said. He said this is not the first time that elephants have escaped from their enclosure.

"Nine elephants were destroyed after they escaped from the Mawana Private Game Reserve as they were believed to pose a threat to residents," said Mntambo.

The IFP's Otto Kunene, who is a member of the KZN Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) portfolio committee, described the situation as a matter of grave concern.

"We will be talking to the honourable MEC Reverend Musa Zondi to hear from the department about what plans they have to solve this problem," Kunene said, adding that he was not aware of another incident where so many elephants escaped.

"It's the first of its kind where so many elephants are roaming. These are dangerous animals," he said.