



Leaders in Environmental Management

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Game auctions in SA are vital to conservation

Article by By Jerome Cartillier, www.iol.co.za on 17 May 2006-05-18



Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, South Africa - South Africa's vibrant game auctions replete with animals ranging from rhinos to giraffes are being seen as a key element to the country's conservation efforts.

As game hunting as well as camera safaris and eco-tourism earn mega bucks, more and more people are being lured to open game farms.

Over the past 10 years, rich South Africans have been increasingly veering towards investing in game farms in the same manner that their European counterparts are putting money into vineyards.

At a recent auction at the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi game park in the eastern province of KwaZulu-Natal, Anton Deswardt, a 39-year-old South African could not hide his excitement.

"The prices have come down a lot in the last three years and maybe you can get a fairly good price," he said, referring to the prices for a white rhinoceros.

"We are ready to buy one but it depends on the price," said Deswardt, who six years ago bought a 600-hectare property in the northern province of Limpopo to set up a game farm.

"I have had a passion for game since I was at school, that has now become more of a business," he said. "I hope to go into the game industry full time."

The Hluhluwe-Imfolozi auction is one of the most prestigious in the country. The auctions are held between March and September and attract hordes.

This year, a zebra is going for R5 000 on average, hippopotamuses fetch about R15 000, giraffes R13 000, while the white rhino - the priciest animal commands R130 000.

The auction starts in the afternoon amid great excitement, drawing the young and the old, as well-heeled retirees compete against young couples striving to carve out a new career in the bush.

Brandon Leer, Hluhluwe-Imfolozi's chief auctioneer, said however the golden age of game auctions were the 1980s and 1990s.

Describing them as "the boom years for game," he said that was the time when people started setting up game farms as businesses to attract visitors in one of the world's top tourist destinations.

"A lot of people were getting into game farming, putting fences," he said. "I can remember seven years ago a mother and a calf rhino could go for R555 000. Now, we would probably get R220 000."

"It is very different. The buyers are businessmen that have invested in game farms. Because they have been successful in business, they are tough guys," he said.

Before the bidding process, prospective buyers inspect the animals - ranging from zebras, gnus, impalas, giraffes, rhinos and hippos - in their pens. Others are not displayed but figure in the brochures.

Apart from the R8-million revenue generated this year at Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, the auction serves another important function.

Jeff Cooke, head of the game capture unit of KZN Wildlife, said the exercise was "ultimately benefiting the species and the biodiversity."



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"We sell what we have got in excess, that's why the number of animals varies from on year to the other," he said.

Cooke said the slide in prices "from a conservation perspective is a success, definitely."

"Because there is an economic value attached to the game in this country, there is an incentive to manage the game and so doing you achieve conservation objectives," he said. - Sapa-AFP