

CONSERVATION

Rangers pay the price of protecting nature, wildlife

STAFF WRITER

THE Game Rangers Association of Africa (GRAA) has reported 64 ranger deaths in Africa over the past year.

Since 2011, more than 700 African rangers have lost their lives, with at least 353 killed by militant groups, terrorists, or poachers, according to the GRAA.

The International Ranger Federation reports that 140 rangers worldwide have died in the past year while on duty.

"On World Ranger Day, we celebrate the vital role of rangers in conservation and honour those who have sacrificed their lives protecting nature.

"Rangers are the custodians of our planet, essential to advancing global biodiversity goals and ensuring a sustainable future for both people and nature.

"Their work in managing vast areas of land and water significantly contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including the target of protecting 30% of the planet by 2030 (30x30)," the GRAA said.

The association honoured fallen colleagues both in Africa and globally.

"Just this week we lost five of our African Parks ranger colleagues in Benin (alongside seven soldiers) in an attack by militant jihadists in W National Park. An absolute tragedy highlighting the odds rangers face," the GRAA said.

"On World Ranger Day, we pay tribute to our fallen ranger colleagues and acknowledge their steadfast dedication.

"We honour their immense sacrifices and celebrate the bravery of rangers working to protect our natural world for the benefit of us all. Today, and every day, we will put rangers first," said GRAA chief executive Andrew Campbell.

The GRAA also announced the launch of the 2024 African Conservation Awards, set to take place in November.

These awards will recognise the

exceptional contributions of rangers across Africa, underscoring their critical role in global planetary health which all humans and nature rely on to survive.

The Public Servants Association yesterday commended the dedication and bravery of rangers as they continue to risk their lives in the interest of preservation of the planet's biodiversity.

"The PSA pays tribute to the rangers who paid the highest price or were injured in the line of duty."

"The job of a ranger comes with many dangers inherent to the profession. Rangers often operate in remote and often hostile environments, facing threats from poachers and wild animals.

"Despite these challenges, they remain dedicated to their mission, driven by a deep passion for nature and wildlife."

The PSA said it recently took on the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism to provide rangers with essential working tools, including communication devices and uniforms.

"Rangers' importance is often ignored by government as their work is not as evident as that of other professions that are in the face of people. Rangers, despite spending most of their time away from home in protecting wildlife against poachers, were scarcely mentioned by government in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The PSA appeals to government to urgently address the rangers' circumstances."

Marking World Ranger Day at the Kruger National Park Forestry, Fisheries and Environment deputy minister Bernice Swarts said: "Colleagues, words are not enough to thank you, save to say that for many of us, to be a ranger is tantamount to being a special breed of citizens.

"You are dynamic and you set the agenda for conservation. It is you who brings to life the legislative expression which requires SANParks to manage and protect our national parks"