



**forestry, fisheries
& the environment**

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ref: O2/1/5/2

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 2264 {NW2679E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 23 of 2022

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 10 June 2022

Mr D W Bryant (DA) to ask the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

- (1) Given that concerns have been raised regarding the potential negative impact of increased numbers of elephant on forested areas and indigenous raptor populations in the Kruger National Park (KNP), what is the current estimated elephant population of the KNP;
- (2) whether any scientific evidence has emerged from clearly identifiable negative impacts on forested areas and populations of high nesting bird species as a result of increased elephant populations in the KNP; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (3) whether the KNP still considers carrying capacities for animal species; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what would the capacity be for elephant?

2264. THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPLIES:

- (1) The current estimated elephant population of the Kruger National Park (KNP) is 27 992.
- (2) There is no scientific evidence of clearly identifiable negative impacts on forested areas and high nesting species as the KNP falls within the savanna biome with very few true "forested" areas. In savannas, elephant impacts are very heterogenous, ranging from negligible to high, which is mostly measured as large tree mortality.

In respect of species that depend on large trees for nesting, the following are the relevant details:

- Martial eagle productivity is generally low. There is no clear link to the loss of large trees and elephant damage.
- Active nests of lappet-faced and white-headed vultures declined, while active nests of African white-backed vultures increased between 2013 and 2020. There is no clear link to the loss of large trees and elephant damage.
- African white-backed and hooded vultures that rely on large trees in the riparian vegetation for nesting were negatively impacted by the loss of the trees during the floods in 2012 and 2013.
- Ground hornbill populations are robust and dynamic despite elephants contributing to large tree mortality.

(3) The KNP is more than 2 million hectares with 35 different landscapes and vegetation (excluding those from neighbouring areas), each of which will have very different food and water resources for elephants. It is connected to other conservation areas, such as private game reserves and the transfrontier conservation area. It is, therefore, difficult to determine and have a fixed capacity for elephants. Environmental conditions change from year to year and animals move across the landscapes. Scientific studies suggest that the elephant population will most likely fluctuate in future somewhere between 30 000 and 40 000 elephants, with large variation from year to year as elephants can move across large scales.

Regards



MS B D CREECY, MP
MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 24/6/2022