

A person wearing a red shirt and dark pants is holding a white bag, standing in a lush green bushveld. The background is filled with dense green foliage and trees. The text is overlaid on this image.

BOOM IN THE BUSHVELD – KUMANE

THE STRANGE DEATH OF THE FIRST CAPTIVE SOUTHERN GROUND HORNBILL TO BE RELEASED INTO THE WILD.

The day after he was released, Kumane flew to an extensive, pine-forested, river valley close to the release site, leaving behind an attentive female and food. This happened in the breeding season after he had been held in a boma and provided with food twice a day for six weeks. The boma, where he adjusted to his new habitat, was on a farm near Haenertsberg. The Mabula Project had previously released two hand-reared birds into this area in the last two and a half years.

Kumane was a second chick, 'harvested' from the Kruger National Park in 1996, and had been at the Hoedspruit Rehabilitation Centre, Kapama for 9 years. He was released fitted with a radio transmitter. On his first flight, in the evening light at Christmas he flew strongly down the valley after the female.

He was followed using radio telemetry for a full day and then every day thereafter. As he appeared stressed, we did not approach him and he made no signs of approaching us. On the ninth day and the tenth morning the signal showed that he was no longer moving.

Later that morning Kumane was found in a black plastic bag in a gully at the side of the road. The autopsy results showed that he had been poisoned as a result of consuming Carbofuran-poisoned insects and had developed pulmonary congestion and also had fractures on the left flank. It had rained continuously for a week. Confused and ataxic due to poisoning he could have been more susceptible to accidental or malicious trauma such as a vehicle collision or attack. Then he was bagged and left – possibly for muti?

This leaves more questions than answers and great sadness for this beautiful bird. An investigation is in progress, and there are detailed records available of this release and the autopsy report. A failure to release a bird successfully back into the wild is a learning curve for us all and we must look at it as such.

The Mabula Ground Hornbill Project
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