

Definition: Neutral Coverage

'Miracle man' slain

Army reports death



MYSTERY DEATH: Funokwayo Mfana Mbonambi after he was attacked by a hippo last year **Picture: BONGANI MTHEMBU**

A hippo attack survivor has been reported dead, writes Bongani Mthembu

IN SPITE of having lost almost all of his face after being mauled by a hippo, a man suspected of being a career poacher has been killed while allegedly poaching in Mozambique.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife officials said they received a report from the Mozambican army that Funokwayo Mfana Mbonambi, 35, of Kosi Bay in northern KwaZulu-Natal, was shot dead by Mozambican game rangers while he was allegedly poaching there.

Information surrounding his death is sketchy and it is not known whether he was poaching. His body was buried there.

In April last year, Mbonambi was savaged by a hippo, leaving him without a nose, only one eye and massive internal injuries, in an area of Kwankumende in Kosi Bay.

Hospital staff at Manguzi Hospital in Kosi Bay, where Mbonambi first received medical attention after being picked up by a good Samaritan, dubbed him "Miracle Man" because he survived his serious injuries.

He had extensive reconstructive surgery at King Edward VIII Hospital.

Earlier reports said Mbonambi was on his way home when he was attacked by a hippo, but an investigation conducted by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife found he was poaching hippos with an AK47 rifle inside the park in an

area that is not used at night. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's media manager Jeff Gaisford said the investigation indicated that an AK47 belonging to Mbonambi was found just after last year's incident.

"We strongly believe he was also poaching in Mozambique. We say that because poaching seems to be addictive. Once somebody starts doing it, he/she ... struggles to stop it," said Gaisford.

He said hippos were under huge threat in the Kosi Bay area from local people who either shot them or trapped them.

When *The Independent On Saturday* visited Mbonambi's family in Kosi Bay this week, they discovered that hippos were not only killed for meat, but for muthi as well.

"They are mainly killed for meat, but the number of people who kill them for muthi is also increasing," said a resident.

Mbonambi's grieving mother-in-law Mezabuloni Mthembu said she did not know what happened to him. She seemed hesitant about Mbonambi's alleged poaching.

"He was a good fellow who liked hunting small animals, not hippos. He disappeared and we don't know where he went to. We have been receiving different stories. Some say he was seen crossing the border to Mozambique, while others say they last saw him in Manguzi town," she said, adding that the family would love to have Mbonambi's remains so they could bury him with dignity.