

PEST CONTROL

Virtual fence deters baboons

The success of the virtual fence (VF) activated in Gordon's Bay in January 2016 to keep baboons out of town could result in the use of this technology in the Karoo, where baboons have become a major threat to sheep.

According to Justin O'Riain, a professor of biological sciences at the University of Cape Town (UCT), baboons were regarded as the most threatening pest species in Africa, and caused significant damage to pine trees in plantations, crops and urban areas. More recently, baboons have become a threat to smallstock in the Karoo.

"It has not been quantified by research what the status of predation is in the Karoo, but farmers are reporting increasing losses due to baboons, especially during summer," he said. "Dr Marion Tafani at UCT is currently working on this problem using GPS collars, isotopes and questionnaires to understand the extent of the problem, [to determine] which individual [baboons] eat more meat, and how [they] move on farmland. Her results will be presented to farmers in Sutherland, Laingsburg and Beaufort West in November," he explained.

Phil Richardson, behavioural ecologist and project manager at Human Wildlife Solutions in Cape Town, developed the VF, which creates a "landscape of fear" to deter specific animals from particular regions.

According to Richardson, this 'fear' is created by simulating the presence of predators by emitting predator calls, alarm calls and the sound of animals being killed through speakers.

"Our VF consists of several action stations that are placed in a VF line between the Steenbras Dam and the False Bay coastline.

OIL EXPLORATION

Gas exploration application withdrawn

Mining company, Sungu Sungu Gas (Pty) Ltd, has withdrawn its application for oil and gas exploration. The company's application spanned 565 000ha from Verkykerskop in the Free State to Winterton in KwaZulu-Natal.

Farmer's Weekly previously reported that Sungu Sungu's initial draft scoping report (DSR) had been conducted by Environmental Impact Management Services, a private company appointed to assess the impact of oil and gas exploration. However, according to community members, this report was not up to standard.

Adele Slater, a former attorney and dairy farmer from Ladysmith, said that in terms of Section 10 of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Act, the Petroleum Agency of South Africa (PASA) was obligated to allow stakeholders time to submit objections and comments with regard to the exploration application within 14 days of accepting the application. According to Slater, PASA did not adhere to this requirement.

"We lodged an appeal with the Minister of Mineral Resources, Mosebenzi Zwane, regarding PASA's failure to comply with

Section 10, and requested that the minister interdict PASA from further considering the [DSR]," she said.

"On 22 October, we were advised that the [DSR] had [already] been accepted on 22 September. We then brought a High Court application against Minister Zwane, PASA and Sungu Sungu, requesting that Sungu Sungu be interdicted from processing the application for exploration pending the finalisation of the appeal. Sungu Sungu then withdrew [its] application."

Slater added that there were many aspects of Sungu Sungu's application that did not comply with relevant legislation.

"It became apparent that Sungu Sungu would steam-roll ahead until they faced a group of people who were prepared to take them to court."

Slater also said that farmers needed to understand that applications for exploration were legal processes, and that the relevant parties needed to be challenged in court.

As another company had submitted an application for exploration adjacent to the 565 000ha in Sungu Sungu's application, the matter could still be heard in court. – *Gerhard Uys*

These action stations are waterproof boxes that contain a double-barrelled bear banger and two high-amp speakers with 99 sound channels. The stations are radio controlled from a hand-held remote with a range of 700m," he said.

The troop's alpha male and female were collared with GPS radio collars developed by HWS and Donix, a company that specialises in electronic solutions.

The location of the baboons is transmitted through relay stations to a gateway linked by a Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) to the Internet, and all the baboons' movements are saved on the website, Sensorian.

When the baboons come within 500m of the VF, an

operator receives an SMS that informs him or her of the baboons' position.

The operator then drives to the site, and hides seven action stations about 50m apart amongst vegetation. Meanwhile, another operator, hidden from sight on a nearby hillside, starts playing the sounds.

Over the past five years, baboons have been an increasingly severe problem in Gordon's Bay, according to Richardson.

"The [VF] principle is now being extended to Hermanus, which experiences similar baboon raiding problems. Mines and power stations in the bushveld could also benefit from [this] technology," he said. – *Siyanda Sishuba*