

## **Wrong to kill them**

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ELEPHANTS are highly intelligent and inquisitive, built for long seasonal migrations .... until man fenced them in.

The Kruger Park bulls that walked through the western fence onto community land should not have been slaughtered. The public is rightly outraged.

Conservation officials say the animals left the park because of a food shortage resulting from too many elephants. Researcher Bruce Page disagrees, saying the fences are badly maintained – not electrified and elephant-proof as they are in Addo, for instance. There is no evidence, he says, that Kruger elephants do not have enough food.

The elephant debate has divided the scientific community. Some believe the numbers of some 12 000 in Kruger should be reduced to lessen the decline in woody vegetation. Others are convinced fewer elephants will only slow down vegetation change, a process that continued during the 35 years when elephants were culled.

They say the park's managers should be paying attention to other ways of conserving biodiversity. Like the way fire is used, or water provision, and expanding the area under conservation. They say man-made climate change, not too many elephants, is now by far the greatest threat to species diversity. Author Lyall Watson wrote that if elephants didn't exist, you couldn't invent one. Yet they touch us like no other wild animal, which is why so many have fought for their international protection. Those who gave the order to shoot the six bulls should hang their heads in shame.