Top mathematicians fly in to fight rhino poaching

LEE RONDGANGER

SOME of the world's leading mathematicians will travel to South Africa next week to try to come up with a mathematical equation that might help authorities fight rhino poaching.

Mathematicians from the UK, Russia, India and Australia, with their South African counterparts, will gather at Wits University on Monday for a five-day Mathematics in Industry Study Group workshop.

The study group, which has been held in various countries for more than 40 years, meets annually to solve social problems using maths.

This year the mathematicians will work with rhino role-players to come up with mathematical solutions to the increasing threat to South Africa's rhino population, focusing on white rhinos.

The workshop will take place against the backdrop of the relentless rhino carnage.

Professor Montaz Ali, of the applied mathematics department at Wits University and one of the organisers of the workshop, said they would consider the job of rangers, the responsibility of the government, rhino breeding and loss of rhinos and "what scientific method can be used efficiently".

"We will put all these scenarios in a model with the hope of solving a mathematical problem," he said.

Each scenario would be given a mathematical equation from which mathematicians could begin working out a possible solution.

"Once we have a solution we will be able to say you need to put so much money to fund preservation, security and breeding," he said.

The ultimate goal would be to provide the model to wildlife authorities as a possible blueprint to fight rhino poachers.

"Next week is only the start of a year-long project," Ali said.