



## CRIME

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# Pangolin trafficking and related arrests on the uptick

*There have been at least 12 pangolin rescues this year.*



Four more men were apprehended after being found in possession of a pangolin pictured. Picture: Supplied

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Multiple arrests have been made recently in connection with pangolin trafficking in operations in Gauteng, Free State and Mpumalanga. Prof Ray Jansen, founding member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature Pangolin Specialist Group, and his partners rescued a trafficked [pangolin](#) in Midrand in a sting operation last week.

It was the 12th pangolin rescued this year. Jansen said the pangolin was in a critical condition and might not survive. South African Citizens Against Rhino Poaching director Kim da Ribeira said the increase in pangolin trafficking was concerning.

## Serious crime

Da Ribeira said that poachers and traffickers did not stop at one species and often went after others using similar methods. [Hawks](#) spokesperson in the Free State Captain Tlangelani Rikhotso said last week members of the Hawks' Serious Organised [Crime](#) Investigation arrested four suspects aged between 29 and 45 in Mahikeng who were trying to sell two pangolins for R200 000.

Rikhotso added that on 2 June, four suspects aged between 43 and 59 were arrested in Vryburg in possession of a pangolin. “It is alleged that the suspects were headed to Mahikeng to meet a buyer for a pangolin that they were selling for R60 000 when they were stopped by members of the Hawks’ Serious Organised Crime Investigation and members of Saps [SA Police Service] Tactical Response Team along Vryburg Road,” she said.

**ALSO READ: [Four suspects nabbed for possession of a pangolin](#)**

## Mpumalanga

In Mpumalanga, 16 suspects arrested during the Blood Orange operation appeared in the Mbombela Commercial Crimes Court last week on charges of money laundering, corruption, conspiracy, and contravening section 57 of National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, relating to dealing in rhino horns.

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Hawks Mpumalanga spokesperson Colonel Katlego Mogale said the 16 suspects, including two former field rangers and their family members, were arrested following an investigation by a multidisciplinary team in a project dubbed Blood Orange.

“The team included KPMG, the SA Revenue Service and FIC (Financial Intelligence Centre). “The case against the 16 was postponed to 25 October for the final auditors’ report and pre-trial conference,” she said.

**ALSO READ: [Suspected pangolin trafficker arrested in Gravelotte](#)**

## Minister ramping-up efforts

Last month, Minister Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Barbara Creecy said the department was ramping up efforts to address rhino poaching and related wildlife crimes in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi game reserve through support to Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife. She said the department would also invest R40 million in improving boundary fencing at the reserve.

Criminologist Dr Witness Maluleke said: “The poaching of endangered species and plants, as currently witnessed in our various court arenas, is common across South African national parks and rural areas.

“Subsistence and commercial poaching are commonly practised to meet food and medicinal needs of local communities, as well as involving greed and the mass killing of wildlife linked to international illegal trades,” he said.

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## The complexity of the crime

Maluleke said poaching was a complex crime, consisting of different operations, such as placing snares and traps and other more sophisticated methods to capture the animals. He added the

poachers were often heavily armed. Criminologist Prof Jaco Barkhuizen said poaching in South Africa had an international criminal component.

He said an increase in poaching was due to the economy going down and the crime rates going up. "There is a huge market outside South Africa for abalone, pangolins and rhino horns, which is sad because we are losing a lot of species that go extinct due to human behaviour and criminality," said Barkhuizen.