

## Eight arrested for cutting up lions in North West

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Page no: 8



**SOUTH AFRICAN police raided an illegal Vietnamese lion and tiger bone syndicate operating in the North West at the weekend, after at least 40 lions were reportedly killed at a lion farm near Klerksdorp.**

According to Hawks spokesperson captain Tlangelani Rikhotso, six foreigners and two South African men were nabbed in the multi-disciplinary operation conducted by members of the Potchefstroom Crime Intelligence unit, the Hawks and the Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp flying squads units.

Police moved to arrest the suspects after keeping a close watch on activities at a farm near Hartbeesfontein, on the N12 between Klerksdorp and Wolmaransstad.

It is believed at least 30 lions were killed at the farm on Saturday, while 10 others were killed on Friday.

The suspects were intercepted while driving in a convoy from the N12 farm to an unused farm in Mareetsane. After searching the white Toyota Hilux bakkie, a silver Toyota Lexus sport utility vehicle and a trailer the suspects were using, officers recovered lion bones, lion meat, a tiger skin, gas cylinders, gas burners, containers, a saw, knives and other equipment believed to have been used to cut the lion bones.

The suspects took the team to a farm approximately 30km from Klerksdorp where the lions were allegedly slaughtered. At the farm, a lion skin was found dumped in the bush and large machines – which are believed to have been used to cut the bones – were also found in the garage.

It is understood that one of the South African suspects arrested is a 22-year-old who works at a notorious Vietnamese-owned hunting lodge that has been linked to the pseudo-hunting of rhinos and the smuggling of rhino horns, lion bones and tiger parts.

The eight suspects, aged between 22 and 60, were set to appear in the Klerksdorp Magistrate's Court to face several charges, including possession of game products without a permit and carrying out restricted activities involving a specimen of a listed, threatened or protected species.

The National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is also currently embroiled in a court battle that seeks to interdict the government's policy permitting the export of lion skeletons to south-east Asia, where they are ground into dubious products disguised as cure-all tonics and potions. – news24