

NEWS

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Alleged pangolin traffickers arrested in Kyalami while looking for a buyer

By Jehran Naidoo 5h ago

Durban - Six alleged pangolin traffickers aged between 30 and 43, were arrested by the Hawks on Wednesday in Kyalami, north of Johannesburg.

The arrest came as a result of a collaborative effort between the Hawks' Wildlife Trafficking unit and NGO Pangolin Africa, an initiative of the University of Pretoria.

Gauteng Hawks spokesperson Captain Lloyd Ramovha said in a statement on Thursday that the six men were arrested at the Kyalami Corner shopping complex.

“The unsuspecting syndicate aged between 30 and 43 was pounced upon when they were in the process of looking for a buyer of one of the most protected and vulnerable species,” Ramovha said.

Ramovha said that in addition to the arrests, police also seized a Toyota Fortuner, a Mini Cooper and a number of cellphones.

The suspects were also in possession of a live pangolin at the time of arrest.

The six suspects will be brought up on charges of dealing as well as the possession of pangolin in contravention of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA).

They were expected to appear at the Midrand Magistrate's Court on Friday.

The pangolin is considered the most widely trafficked animal globally, with their scales being the main attraction. There are four known African pangolin species.

The scales of the pangolin are generally dried and used for medicinal purposes. Pangolin meat is also consumed by humans.

During the course of 2019, 97 tons of scales were trafficked from Africa, which equates to roughly 160,000 pangolins, according to the co-founder of the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital and wildlife rehabilitation specialist Nicci Wright.

The arrest made by the Hawks comes just weeks after the first dedicated pangolin veterinary ward in Africa was opened in Johannesburg, the only one to have been mandated by the South African government.

The ward is the only facility in the country to have been tasked with the treatment and rehabilitation of captured pangolins.

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