

PICS: Alleged poachers caught trying to sell pangolin in Midrand  
*The pangolin was named Olivia because her three perpetrators were handed over to the Olievenhoutbosch police and are expected in court next week.*



Three suspects were arrested by Saps whilst trying to sell a live pangolin at the Shell Ultra City in Samrand on 21 May 2021. Picture: Neil McCartney

Three alleged pangolin poachers were bust red-handed and arrested when they tried to sell an animal to a “potential client” at a Shell garage on the N1 in Midrand on Friday.

Olivia was the seventh pangolin rescued this year from poachers.

The suspects were arrested during a sting operation that included members of nonprofit organisation Pangolin Africa, the Cullinan stock theft and endangered species unit, the Bronkhorstspuit police, Crime Intelligence, Gdot and the Green Scorpions.

Tshwane University professor Ray Jansen, chair of the African Pangolin Working Group, said the operation happened quickly after the poachers contacted him on Wednesday about selling the pangolin.

“After the arrest, we found an adult female Temminck’s pangolin weighing in at 8.3kg inside the boot of a Toyota Corolla,” Jansen said.

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The pangolin was named Olivia because her three perpetrators were handed over to the Olievenhoutbosch police and are expected to make an appearance in court next week.

Jansen said Olivia was very weak, although she is not physically injured.

“It seems she has been in captivity for approximately two weeks, despite the poachers claiming they caught her on Monday.”



1/5

The rescued pangolin in the rescuers bakkie after a sting operation in which three suspects were arrested by Saps whilst trying to sell a live pangolin at the Shell Ultra City in Samrand on 21 May 2021. Picture: Neil McCartney



2/5

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3/5

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4/5

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5/5

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Olivia was taken to the Johannesburg Wildlife Veterinary Hospital and is being treated in an off-site location.

Jansen said during the Covid-19 pandemic last year, a total of 38 poached pangolins were rescued, compared to the previous year's 36.

*Saturday Citizen* photographer Neil McCartney said when he got to the location of the sting operation, the suspects had already been arrested.

"The rescue happened really quickly. When I ran towards them, the suspects were just arrested and laying on the ground," McCartney said.

He found it interesting that the professor had used the opportunity to educate the public who gathered at the scene about pangolin poaching.

This week, poacher Orateng Mekwe was handed a 10-year jail sentence without the option of a fine by the Pretoria Magistrate's Court.

Jansen described the sentence as "ground breaking" and said it set a South African and an African continental precedent.

Mekwe and his co-accused, Jealous Rungano, a Zimbabwean national who was sentenced to three years in prison, were found guilty of contravening the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act.

They was also found guilty of carrying out a restricted activity pertaining to the illegal trade of pangolins.

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