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War on Poachers in SA Heats Up as SANParks Arrests Another 4

Rhino Poaching Suspects

By

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The War on Rhino Poaching in South Africa Image by [Ian Lindsay](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The war on poachers in South Africa appears to have taken a sharp turn in the right direction... with successful convictions during May, as well as several arrests.

Just in the past week, the South African National Parks (SANParks) has arrested another four poaching suspects.

SANParks announced today (5 June 2021) that well executed operations at the end of May led to the arrest of four suspected poachers. The first incident was last weekend, on Sunday 30 May in the Pretoriuskop Section, and the other on Monday in the Houtboschrand Section, both located in the South of the Kruger National Park (KNP).

SANParks said that rangers (with K9 support) responded last Sunday to a visual of two suspected rhino poachers and went in pursuit of them. The Airwing Unit was called in to support the ground teams; and before long the two suspects were arrested without incident.

One rhino poaching suspect fatally wounded

The following day, three tracks of suspected poachers were picked up by Rangers (again with K9 support). They followed their tracks and made contact with three suspects. During the altercation, one suspect was fatally wounded.

A lengthy follow-up ensued with the support of the Airwing Unit, making use of a helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft as well as support from additional line K9s and free running hounds. This led to the eventual apprehension of the remaining two suspects.

During both operations, a high calibre hunting rifle, ammunition and poaching equipment were seized.

All suspects were handed over to the South African Police Service (SAPS) for further handling and the suspects will appear in court in due course.

Poachers target weekends

[KNP Head Ranger, Cathy Dreyer](#) (aka the 'rhino whisperer') congratulated all those who were involved in the operations. She said:

*"We are proud of the teamwork and dedication of our Rangers Corp, our aviators and the K9 units, who execute our anti-poaching efforts in extremely difficult conditions. We are aware that **poachers are currently targeting weekends for their misdeeds in the mistaken belief that rangers do not work during that time.***

"Only through discipline, teamwork and tenacity will we be able help stem the tide of rhino poaching in KNP and we have members of our teams in the field all day all week 24/7, who have vowed to protect and conserve our fauna and flora."

Rhino poaching suspects successfully sentenced

May also saw the successful culmination of two long-running [rhino poaching](#) trials by the Skukuza Regional Court (which was re-opened on 1 April). One rhino poacher was sentenced on 14 May to 13 years, whilst three

– including a [former SANParks employee – were sentenced](#) to 16 years each on 17 May.

Well known [Stroop](#) filmmaker and conservationist, [Bonné de Bod](#), said:

“Good to see convictions and appropriate sentences for rhino poachers handed down this past month – well done to all involved... Let’s hope this will serve as a strong message, our rhinos need it.”

Rhino poaching in South Africa on the increase since relaxed Lockdown laws

[Rhino poaching has unfortunately seen an increase](#) since the relaxation of Lockdown regulations. According to Jo Shaw, the Africa Rhino Lead for WWF International Network: “Since November, December last year and into 2021, this landscape and particularly the Kruger National Park has been experiencing serious numbers of rhino poaching incidents.”

Number of rhinos in the Kruger Park and in South Africa

Drought has also hit the rhino population in the area hard. Together with the relentless poaching, the [number of rhinos in the Kruger National Park has plummeted almost more than two thirds](#) in the last decade to around 3,800 in 2019 from 11,800 rhinos in 2008, a South African National Parks report showed.

South Africa has about 16,000 rhinos located nationwide, the environmental ministry told Reuters in May.

Increasingly, reserves are using **dehorning** as one of the methods to deter poachers, with [Princess Charlene of Monaco being the latest celebrity to accompany a dehorning](#) team in the bush to raise awareness about the plight of South Africa's rhino.

Possibility of radioactive markers in rhino horns

The feasibility of using [radioactive markers in rhino horns](#), to make smuggled horns detectable at global ports of entry, is also currently being tested by researchers in South Africa. While cutting horns off to prevent poaching needs to be done every 18 months, radioactive markers would only need to be inserted every five years, according to James Larkin, director at the radiation and health physics unit at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg.

Elephant poachers sentenced

Two [elephant poachers](#) were also successfully sentenced this week to eight years each, for killing an elephant in the Skukuza National Park in November 2018.

Nominations are now open if you would like to [nominate a rhino conservation hero](#).