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South African rhino poaching increased 50% this year, still lower than before pandemic

By

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A 3-week-old female white rhino stands with her mother, Tanda, at the Ramat Gan Safari, near Tel Aviv, Israel, on September 4, 2014. In their natural habitat in South Africa, white rhino poaching increased 50% in

the first six months of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020. File Photo by Debbie Hill/UPI | [License Photo](#)

July 31 (UPI) -- There was a 50% increase in the number of rhinoceroses killed in the first six months of 2021 in South Africa compared to the same period last year, but the figure is still lower than pre-pandemic years, the country's government announced Saturday.

Barbara Creecy, the minister of environment, forestry and fisheries, said 249 rhinos have been poached for their horns from Jan. 1 through the end of June. That's up from the 166 poached in the same time period in 2020, but still a marked decline from 2019, which saw 318 rhino poaching.

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The ministry blamed the 2021 increase over 2020 on the lifting of [COVID-19](#) pandemic restrictions.

"While the national lockdowns that curbed the movement of people to halt the spread of the virus in 2020 contributed to a decrease in rhino poaching, the lifting of the stringent lockdown regulations appears to have seen an increase in rhino poaching in the first six months of 2021," a [ministry statement](#) said.

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During the first half of 2021, there were 715 poaching incidents -- including 132 rhino deaths and one elephant death -- in Kruger National Park, a 3.77% increase over 2020.

The ministry said authorities arrested 40 alleged poachers in the park during the first half of the year, and 125 throughout the country. Authorities finalized 14 cases of poaching with a 93% conviction rate, with an overall slowdown of court cases due to pandemic restrictions.

"It is clear that the multi-disciplinary, integrated approach to investigating illegal wildlife trade is bearing fruit and that effective collaboration with critical role players remains key to our success," Creecy said. "I congratulate the teams on a job well done."

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White rhinoceroses are classified as near threatened and primarily call South Africa their home, though populations can also be found in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Kenya, according to the [World Wildlife Fund](#).