



NEWSCRIME AND COURTS

A CONSERVATION official and a North West businessman have been arrested in connection with illegal rhino horn trade. File Photo: Armand Hough

North West conservation official and a businessman arrested for illegally dealing in rhino horn

By [Jonisayi Maromo](#) 10h ago

PRETORIA – An official from the North West department of economic development, environment, conservation and tourism (Dedect) has been arrested in connection with illegal rhino horn trade, the national department of forestry, fisheries and the environment has confirmed.

The official and the owner of a security company were arrested yesterday in relation to alleged contraventions of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, the rhino norms and standards and contravention of permit conditions.

“The men were arrested and a vehicle seized by a multi-departmental team comprising members of the department’s Green Scorpions, working in collaboration with the Hawks, the Dedect and the Northern Cape department of environment and nature conservation,” said spokesperson Albi Modise.

The suspects are alleged to have conveyed 17 individual detached rhino horns from the Northern Cape to North West in contravention of permit conditions issued by both provinces.

“The men are also alleged to have been involved in the trade in rhino horns using permits to cover up their illegal activities,” Modise said.

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“The suspects will appear in the Mmabatho Magistrate’s Court on Monday October 11, 2021. Investigations are ongoing.”

In July, an illicit consignment of 41 pieces of rhino horn stashed in six boxes, concealed in carbon paper and foil, wrapped in traditional material, and disguised as fine art was seized at the OR Tambo International Airport in Gauteng.

The consignment, valued at R115.7 million, was found by sniffer dogs during a customs warehouse inspection at OR Tambo International Airport, destined for Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

A day before, customs officials had seized a 47kg consignment of rhino horns destined for Malaysia from the busy airport, which was marked and declared as scaffolding equipment, valued at R3m.

Last year, and in the first half of this year, several major seizures of ivory, rhino horn, pangolin and rosewood have been recorded, says the World Wildlife Crime 2020 report, by the UN’s Office on Drugs and Crime .

The report identified a “sharp decline” in markets for ivory and rhino horn. Several very large seizures of both ivory and rhino horn were made last year, “which is likely to be a record year once all the data is in. Unless indicators emerge of renewed poaching, the source of this ivory was likely stockpiles, exported before prices declined further still” .

It is estimated that ivory and rhino horn generated more than \$600m annually between 2016 and 2018.

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