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Five arrested for possession of protected plants worth R600 000



POLICE have arrested five suspects in the Northern Cape for possession of Conophytum Achabense plants. File Photo: SAPS

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Written by

[Robin-Lee Francke](#)

Multimedia Journalist, IOL News



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CAPE TOWN – Police in the Northern Cape have arrested five suspects for the possession of protected plants worth over R600 000.

According to the provincial police spokesperson, Lieutenant Colonel Sergio Kock, officers attached to the Springbok Stock Theft and Endangered Species Unit, Springbok K9 unit and the Springbok Highway Patrol arrested five male suspects along the N14 highway near Springbok on Thursday.

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Police confiscated 8 130 *Conophytum Achabense* plants and three cellphones that were found in their possession.

The genus *Conophytum* can be used as a good botanical model for studying patterns of diversity and speciation in the succulent Karoo biome, the effects of climate change on dwarf succulents, and for informing conservation planning efforts, Scielo.org reported.

Conophytum is a genus of South African and Namibian succulent plants that belong to the family Aizoaceae.

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According to SANBI.org, the genus Conophytum is believed to have sedative properties, possibly as a result of mesembrine-type alkaloids.

“The five men are between the ages of 22 and 25 and will soon appear in the Springbok Magistrate’s Court,” Kock said.

The group are charged under the Nature Conservation Act 9/2009 section 50 and 51 for illegal possession of protected plants.

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Colonel Schalk Andrews, the Acting District Commander for Namakwa commended the team for a sterling job done.

“We urge people to keep on reporting crimes of this nature to the police by sending an anonymous SMS to 32211 or by contacting us on the MySaps App,” Andrews said.

Earlier this month, nine suspects were arrested and appeared in the Goodwood Magistrate’s Court in Cape Town after they were found in possession of protected plants.

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The bust came after a joint operation between Northern and Western Cape policing units.

The operation took place in Elsies River on January 6.

“Police confiscated 3 500 Conophytum Achabense plants worth approximately R200 000 and Conophytum Fredericea plants with an estimated street value of R150 000.

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“Police also confiscated a VW Polo, an Opel Kadett and five cellphones that were allegedly utilised in the commission of these crimes,” Kock said.

robin.france@inl.co.za

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