



Sixty dogs dispatched across Kruger National Park to help curb poaching

Scent is one of the dogs deployed to curb poaching in the Kruger National Park. Picture: Supplied

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Pretoria - Sixty dogs have been dispatched across the Kruger National Park to help curb poaching. The almost 2 million-hectare park has a major problem with poachers targeting rhinos, lions and elephants.

Dogs have been found to be adept at sniffing out poachers and have led to over 90% of the arrests made.

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The K-9 unit was established seven years ago.

This is according to Kruger section ranger Kally Ubisi, who was speaking at a facility in Skukuza, Mpumalanga, where the dogs are kept and trained.

“We found that dogs were the game changers and that’s when we decided to go for dog handler training.”

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He said that with the help of honorary rangers and other sponsors, the park was able to get dogs and train them to detect poachers in the park.

“This is where we train the dogs and link them up with their handlers who will be working with them.”

A total of 451 rhino were poached in South Africa last year, 327 within government reserves and 124 on private property. Although there was a 24% decrease in rhino poaching compared to the pre-Covid period in 2019, there has been an increase in poaching on private properties.

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In 2021, 209 rhino were poached for their horns in SA National Parks, whereas in 2020, 247 were poached.

Spokesperson Ike Phaahla said it was important to note that none of their smaller rhino parks experienced any losses from poaching in 2021.

“The steady decline in rhino poaching in Kruger is related to an increase in the intensity of anti-poaching activities in the park,” he said.

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“One of the unintended consequences is that poaching syndicates are looking to other areas for easy prey and this has resulted in their targeting private reserves in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.”

In 2021 there were 189 arrests in connection with poaching: 77 within the Kruger and 109 outside it, Phaahla said. “This compares with 156 people arrested countrywide in 2020.”

He said 61 accused rhino poachers/traffickers were convicted.