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Game rangers arrested for allegedly helping poaching syndicates with information



Two field rangers were arrested for allegedly sharing information with rhino syndicates in exchange for money. Picture: Shelley Kjonstad African News Agency (ANA)

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Rustenburg -Two field rangers were arrested for allegedly sharing tactical information with rhino poaching syndicates in exchange for large sums of money, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI), better known as the Hawks, said on Sunday.

Spokesperson Warrant Officer Bonnie Nxumalo said the two aged 56 and 60 were arrested on Saturday afternoon in Skukuza and were charged with corruption, money laundering and fraud linked to wildlife trafficking.

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“The suspects were arrested by the Mpumalanga based Hawks’ Serious Corruption Investigation team assisted by the Skukuza Stock Theft and Endangered Species Unit during operation Blood Orange. The arrest follows a comprehensive investigation which included their financial affairs. It is alleged that the suspects provided tactical information to rhino poaching syndicates in exchange for large sums of money,” Nxumalo said.

They were expected to appear in the Bushbuckridge Magistrate’s Court on Monday.

“Further arrests cannot be ruled out since the investigation is ongoing. Anyone with further information on the investigation is urged to contact the Hawks investigating officer, Colonel Danie Hall on 071 481 3281,” Nxumalo said.

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On Friday, Mpumalanga police said four alleged rhino poachers arrested in two separate incidents at the Kruger National Park on April 18 and 19 were remanded in custody during their court appearance.

Spokesperson Brigadier Selvy Mohlala said field rangers spotted some human footprints which signalled possible poachers inside the park.

“The rangers followed the tracks with the assistance of a tracker dog and managed to corner two male suspects. Police at Skukuza were notified as such and upon their arrival at the scene of crime, the two men were arrested and charged for possession of an unlicensed firearm with ammunition and more charges may be added as the investigation continues.

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“The pair was found with some items in their possession, which included a hunting rifle with its serial numbers filed-off, eight live ammunition, as well as an axe. The suspect were identified as Raydon Zitha, aged 24 and Ernesto Zitha, aged 27. The investigation also revealed that the two men are Mozambican nationals and had entered South Africa illegally hence they are faced with a charge of contravention of the Immigration Act of South Africa. During their court appearance, the case of the two was postponed to May 4, 2022, for a formal bail hearing while they remain in custody.”

In the second incident, field rangers who were posted at Tshokwane Section of the Kruger National Park, spotted some human footprints in the area and then followed the tracks with the help of a tracker dog where they too managed to arrest two men who were found in possession of a hunting rifle, four live ammunition and an axe.

“Skukuza Police were once again summoned and upon their arrival at the scene, they arrested the two men and charged them for possession of an unlicensed firearm with ammunition and more charges could be added as the investigation proceeds.

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“The suspects were identified as Maxiyi Hlungwana, 33, and Khensani Chauke, 26. The probe so far revealed that the two suspects are originally from Mozambique and had illegally entered South Africa hence a charge of contravention of the Immigration Act of South Africa was added against them. During their court appearance at the Skukuza Regional Court yesterday, Wednesday April 20, 2022, their case was

postponed to May 4, 2022, as well for a formal bail hearing while they remained in custody,” he said.

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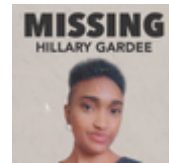
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