

SOUTH AFRICA

Court hands down combined 63-year sentence to three rhino poachers

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Collaborative work by several units resulted in heavy sentences for rhino poachers. Stock photo.

Image: 123RF/Stuart Porter

Three men convicted on 12 charges related to rhino poaching have been sentenced to a combined 63 years in prison.

The Skukuza regional court sentenced Isaac Zitha, 41, Oscar Ndlovu, 38, and Richard Mkhombo 39, on Tuesday — a move welcomed by South African National Parks on Wednesday.

The trio was convicted of an incident that took place in the Stolznek section of the Kruger National Park (KNP) in 2017. Rangers heard gunshots while on patrol and Ndlovu was found hiding in the area and promptly arrested. The rangers called in their K9 colleagues who led them to a backpack and two other suspects, Isaac and Given Zitha.

The backpack contained two rhino horns and a rifle, linked to a carcass found nearby.

The accused were granted bail.

Given Zitha absconded and is still being sought by the police.

Two brothers get lengthy jail terms for poaching rhino in Limpopo

Nicolaas van Deventer, 56, and his brother Gideon van Deventer, 53, were on Thursday sentenced to prison terms of 15 years and 10 years respectively ...

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In 2018, rangers found human tracks in the Kingfisherspruit section of the KNP, which led them to the boundary of the Manyeleti Game Reserve, where Ndlovu was arrested.

The K9 unit was called in and led the team to Isaac Zitha and Mkhombo and later a backpack containing two rhino horns and a rifle, linking the three to a carcass found nearby.

KNP managing executive Gareth Coleman said the sentence was further evidence that collaborative work on criminal matters between different units was bearing fruit and sent a strong message to criminals.

“The police, the prosecution and the Rangers Corp have been diligent in handling these cases and presented foolproof evidence to the courts. The prosecution has also made a compelling argument on our behalf for harsh sentences and we are delighted at the outcomes,” said Coleman.

“We hope the remaining suspect will be apprehended and face trial,” he added.

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