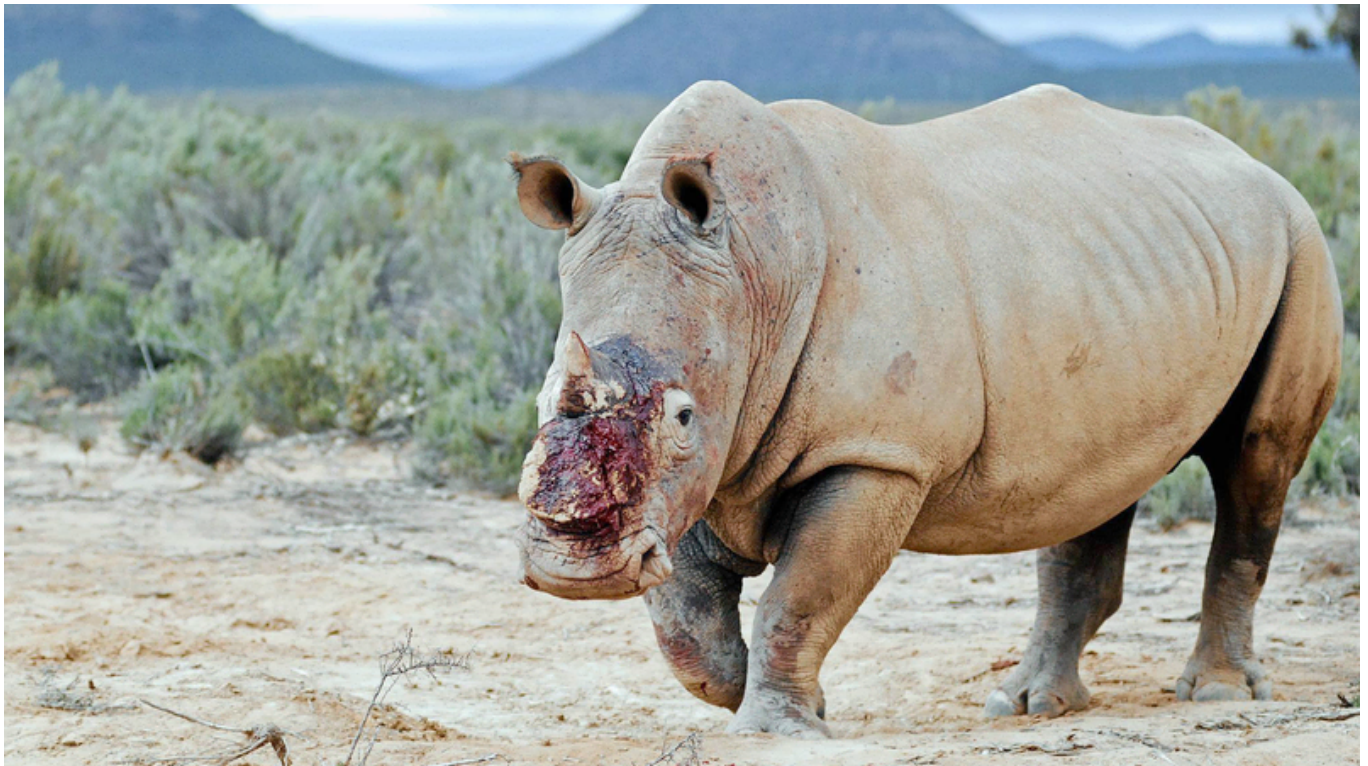




DAILYNEWS NEWS KWAZULU NATAL

Two suspects travelling from KZN to Gauteng arrested with two 'recently extracted' rhino horns



A rhino mutilated for its horn. File Photo: David Ritchie/African News Agency (ANA)

Published 7h ago



Written by

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Durban — Two suspects are expected to appear in court on Monday after the Hawks arrested them for being in possession of two 'recently extracted' rhino horns, while travelling from KwaZulu-Natal to Gauteng.

The arrest comes a week after Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife reported that three would-be poachers were arrested on different days inside the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP), bringing the number of poachers arrested inside HiP in 2022 to five.

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Hawks Spokesperson Captain Lloyd Ramovha said the arrest came when the Hawks Serious Organised Crime Investigation team in Germiston, stock theft, Local Criminal Record Centre, and the Department of Environmental Affairs conducted an intelligence-driven operation after receiving information about a vehicle reportedly travelling from the KwaZulu-Natal to Gauteng with rhino horns.

He said authorities intercepted the identified vehicle, a silver Toyota Fortuner with two occupants, aged 39 and 48, in the east of Johannesburg.

“Upon searching the vehicle, the police found two pieces of rhino horns concealed in the front part of the vehicle. The horns appeared to have been recently extracted. Over R5 000 in cash was found in ... possession,” Ramovha said.

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“The pair have been charged for dealing in rhino horns, thereby contravening the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act.”

Ramovha said the suspects were expected to appear in the Germiston Magistrate's Court on Monday, June 20, on allegations of being in possession of rhino horns.

On June 8, 2022, two poachers, Messrs Sizwe Tivane and Samkele Sithole were found with a .375 rifle and were arrested with the assistance of the K9 Unit. The two had recently travelled from Mpumalanga province and were staying in a house that is a stone's throw away from HiP.

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In another incident, Vusi Mdluli from the Mfekayi area in Mtubatuba was arrested on Monday, June 6, 2022. Mdluli was picked up by the Ezemvelo camera and the field rangers, assisted by a K9 Unit, were deployed to track him.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Spokesperson, Musa Mntambo, said HiP has been under siege since the beginning of 2022. At times, the park has to deal with three to five different groups of poachers who enter the park from different directions at more or less the same time.

He said that, to date, 123 rhinos have been poached in KwaZulu-Natal in both public and private game reserves.

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Last month, when the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy, delivered her budget speech to the National Council of Provinces, she said that poaching pressure had shifted across the country and KZN had become a key target area.

She said that, as a result, departmental resources were deployed to actively support Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the SAPS. This support includes assistance to law enforcement officials and joint operations managers as well as the nerve centre in HiP.

“As the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park is part of the Zululand Integrated Wildlife Zone, the national department has also been assisting the park to link up with potential donors that could support urgent priority interventions, aligned to Ezemvelo's Rhino Crime Combating Intervention Strategy. With the additional resources from the SAPS that have now been deployed to the area, and the ongoing dedicated work of the

Ezemvelo rangers, the department is expecting increased arrests and we will continue to support this integrated effort over the next few months,” Creecy said.

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