

[Home/News/Local news/The war against rhino poachers intensified](#)

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The war against rhino poachers intensified

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m January to the end of June 2022, 82 rhino were poached for their horns in the Kruger National Park.
Photo: Clinton Botha.

In the first six months of 2022 a total of 259 rhino in South Africa have been poached for their horn.

“Recent trends in rhino poaching show a move away from the Kruger National Park to private reserves and KwaZulu-Natal where the majority of rhinos have been killed this year. This makes it all the more important for national government to shift its focus to supporting provincial authorities and private reserves in the war on rhino poaching,” said Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy.

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The number of rhino poached between January and June 2022 is 10 more than the 249 poached countrywide in the first six months of 2021. From January to the end of June 2022, 82 rhino were poached for their horns in the Kruger National Park.

The 2022 poaching statistics show a loss of 210 rhino on state properties and 49 in privately owned parks. As indicated, hardest hit during this period is KwaZulu-Natal which recorded a loss of 133 rhino. This is more than triple the 33 rhino killed in the first six months of 2021.

The demand for rhino horn remains a constant threat to our rhino populations as crime syndicates continue to operate within our borders.”

The minister said the number of successful arrests and prosecutions recorded over the past six months can be attributed to the continued successful collaboration between the law-enforcement agencies including police, Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI Hawks) and the Green Scorpions, Customs officials and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA). These efforts are supported by private security.

“Partnerships between the public and private sector remain key to combating wildlife trafficking. In addition to work being undertaken within the seven Integrated Wildlife Zones, the partnership now includes both the financial and transport sectors, as well as transit and end-user countries in Southeast Asia, especially with the People’s Republic of China, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Between January and June, 69 people were arrested in connection with rhino poaching and rhino horn trafficking. Of these, 13 alleged poachers were arrested in the Kruger National Park.

“As a result of the ongoing work of integrated enforcement teams at OR Tambo International Airport, four alleged rhino horn traffickers were arrested between January and June this year for trying to smuggle 56 pieces of rhino horn out of the country. In one instance, cooperation between the Hawks, Malaysia and Qatar authorities led to the arrest of another alleged rhino horn trafficker and his haul of rhino horn pieces at Doha Airport in Qatar. This arrest demonstrates the success of country-to-country cooperation to combat wildlife trafficking at an international level.”

The Hawks are also working with the US Fish and Wildlife service in an investigation arising from the discovery in June of a suspect parcel at FedEx that was destined for the USA. The parcel contained 8kg of rhino horns pieces concealed as wooden art pieces.

A number of search-and-seizure operations took place countrywide, with the Hawks arresting one suspect and confiscating 29 rhino horn during an operation at storage and packing facilities in Bedfordview where rhino horns are prepared and packed for the illegal markets in Southeast Asia.

Responding to the recommendations of FATF earlier this year the NPA obtained its first conviction on stand-alone charges in terms of section 6 of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998.

“In this matter, the individual was accused of laundering the money earned from, amongst others buying rhino horn, through a casino. Ping Wu was sentenced to five years imprisonment. The success of this prosecution demonstrates the importance of the government’s integrated approach to combating rhino horn trafficking, with increased focus on targeting the financial crimes involved. We are expecting numerous similar successes in the near future.”

Members of the public can report any suspicious activities around wildlife to its environmental crime hotline which is 0800 205 005 or the SAPS number 10111.