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Kruger National Park rhino poacher gets 'what he deserves': 17 years in jail



The Skukuza Regional Court has sentenced Mozambican national Silvester Sidney Zitha to an effective 17 years in jail. Picture: SAPS

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Pretoria – Convicted rhino poacher Silvester Sidney Zitha, 40, has been sentenced to an effective 17 years behind bars by the [Skukuza Regional Court](#).

Mpumalanga police spokesperson Brigadier Selvy Mohlala said Zitha, of Mozambique, was jailed on Tuesday.

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“His sentence stems from a rhino poaching incident in which Zitha and his accomplice were caught after entering the [Kruger National Park](#) via Tshokwana Section between October 18 and 19, 2018,” Mohlala said.

On the morning of October 19, 2018, field rangers in the park spotted human tracks towards the Kingfisher ranger area.

“It is said that they then informed their leader, the section ranger, concerning the discovery. Later on, a chopper was brought in to assist with the search,” said Mohlala.

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The footprints were followed until around 4pm that day when the rangers heard gunshots and saw two men running in their direction. One of the men carried a bag and an axe and the other had a firearm, he said.

The rangers ordered the intruders to stop. However, the two continued to run, dropping the items they were carrying. A chase ensued and the pair were caught.

“Two backpacks were also found in their possession with rhino horns as well as another backpack with live ammunition as well as a .458 hunting rifle with a silencer on. Other items confiscated included an axe,” said Mohlala.

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“Police were summoned and Zitha and his co-accused were arrested. Police discovered that Zitha was in South Africa without valid documentation.”

During their court appearance, police said a bail application was made and Zitha’s co-accused was granted bail. Zitha was denied bail.

The co-accused never returned to court and later died, leaving Zitha to stand trial alone, said Mohlala.

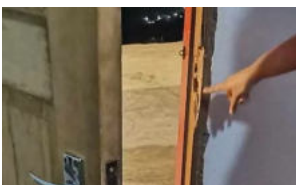
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On Tuesday, Zitha was found guilty and sentenced as follows:

On the count of trespassing, he was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment and on the count of possession of a hunting rifle and silencer, he was sentenced to five years.

On the count of possession of unlicensed ammunition, Zitha was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. On count five, killing a rhino, Zitha was sentenced to 10 years.

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On the count of possession of a dangerous weapon, Zitha was sentenced to one year in prison.

“The accused was also sentenced to four years imprisonment for conspiracy to commit crime,” said Mohlala.

The court ordered that the sentences in count six and four would run concurrently with the sentence on count three, and that the sentence in count seven would run concurrently with the sentence in count five, which amounts to an effective 17 years in prison.

Zitha was declared unfit to possess a firearm.

Meanwhile, Mpumalanga SAPS commissioner Lieutenant-General Semakaleng Daphney Manamela praised those involved for helping to ensure the accused received a “well-deserved sentence”.

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