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Rhino poacher sentenced to 34 years in jail



A man has been sentenced for rhino poaching, while his accomplices remain at large after skipping bail. Picture: Armand Hough

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A man has been sentenced to 34 years in prison for rhino poaching by a court in Mpumalanga. This comes against the backdrop of another court in the area sentencing a man to 17 years for rhino poaching. The Skukuza Regional Court sentenced Siphon Titus Khosa on Friday to 34 years in jail.

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The SAPS provincial commissioner in Mpumalanga, Lieutenant General Semakaleng Daphney Manamela said the sentence stems from two poaching incidents which took place in 2016.

Kruger National Park section rangers had reportedly seen two poachers enter the park on September 27, 2016 through the Stolznek area. Additional field rangers were immediately called in and a search commenced. The two helicopters which were dispatched to assist with the search, played a vital role in enabling the team to spot the two males hiding in thick bushes.

Once the two men were in custody of Kruger field rangers, they were searched and found to be in possession of two rhino horns, a hunting rifle fitted with silencer, a magazine loaded with 11 rounds of live ammunition, two extra magazines, an axe and a backpack containing food.

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The backpack containing food may have meant that the poachers were hoping to stay in the bush for more than a single night.

Police were called to the scene and arrested the two men on charges of possession of an unlicensed hunting rifle, illegal possession of ammunition, illegal possession of a dangerous weapon (the axe), trespassing into the Kruger National Park as well as for killing rhinos. The pair, Sipho Titus Khosa and an accomplice, were granted bail after a brief court appearance.

Less than three months later, on December 4, field rangers patrolling the same area in Stolznek heard gunshots and proceeded to investigate. After an extensive search, rangers captured three poachers, one of them being Khosa. The trio were charged by the police after being found in possession of a hunting rifle loaded with ammunition, a silencer, three rhino horns, an axe, and a dangerous weapon. They were also charged for trespassing into the Kruger National Park.

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Khosa, 34, was the only poacher sentenced due to the fact that his co accused in the first incident never appeared in court after being granted bail, while in the second incident, the other two accused, who were also granted bail, never set foot in court again. Warrants are out for their arrest.

Khosa was sentenced to a collective 34 years imprisonment for his role in the poaching of rhino horn. Police Commissioner Manamela thanked the field rangers from SANParks, the SAPS team of investigators, the prosecution team and the judiciary for the individual roles that they played which resulted in the well-deserved sentence.

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