



NPA applauded for tougher stance on rhino poachers

Simon Bloch
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Gideon van Deventer during his arrest in

Limpopo.

Wildlife officials have hailed the National Prosecuting Authority's (NPA) recent decision to appeal what it called the lenient sentences handed to two rhino poachers in May, as well as the jailing this week of one of the men in a separate case.

On Monday, a Bronkhorstspuit magistrate sentenced Gideon van Deventer to eight years imprisonment on each of two counts relating to the illegal possession and transporting of two hunting rifles in March 2014. The sentences will run concurrently for an effective eight years in jail.

The NPA had **reopened the case** against Van Deventer after it emerged that the original matter from eight years ago had been struck from the roll under dubious circumstances. It was reinstated after a whistle-blower tipped off law enforcement authorities and court officials.

The former national commander of the South African Police Service's Endangered Species Unit, retired Colonel Steve Roets, commended the new commander of detectives at Bronkhorstspuit, Lieutenant Colonel Matthys Strydom, for placing the case back on the court roll. He also welcomed the sentence given to Van Deventer.

"Given all the factors that were taken into consideration, I think eight years is an appropriate sentence," Roets said.

Pietermaritzburg attorney Ilan Lax, a former board-member of **Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife**, said Monday's sentencing "goes some way to remedy the unfortunate lapse in crime intelligence and investigation eight years ago that resulted in the withdrawal of charges and release of this serial poacher and repeat offender".

He paid tribute to state prosecutor Patsy Jacobs for what he called a well-argued address on aggravation of sentence, telling the *Mail & Guardian*: "That she successfully argued for and achieved two eight-year sentences, plus the fact that the brothers' prior sentences dating from May 2022 are being taken on appeal due to their leniency, reflects well on the seriousness with which the NPA regards rhino poaching."

"It sends an important signal that society regards these crimes in a very serious light. Gideon Van Deventer is a repeat offender and the interests of society in trying to prevent this from happening again required a deterrent sentence. This prosecutor emphasised that the

accused had committed a heinous battery of crimes, which induced a sense of disgust” Lax added.

During Monday’s hearing, Jacobs told the Bronkhorstspuit court that Van Deventer had an extensive criminal record dating back to the 1980s, including prior convictions for stock-theft, possessing and transporting unlicensed firearms, and multiple counts of illegally hunting wildlife, especially rhino.