

Nine arrested in cross-province rhino poaching raid

Suspects were accused of providing tactical information to rhino poaching syndicates.

The two main suspects have pending charges of corruption, money laundering and fraud to related wildlife trafficking. Photo for illustration: Susan Scott, Stroop

Police have arrested nine suspects between the ages of 22 and 61 in a multidisciplinary poaching blitz codenamed “Blood Orange” conducted in Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces.

The arrests follows a targeted investigation which involved looking into the suspect’s financial affairs, with auditing firm KPMG brought in to scrutinise the flow of cash into their accounts.

Poaching syndicates

The two main suspects have pending charges of corruption, money laundering and fraud to related wildlife trafficking, whilst others are their family members.

The duo were suspected of providing tactical information to rhino poaching syndicates in exchange for substantial sums of money.

Money was allegedly funnelled through bank accounts of family members who in turn received gratification and benefited from illicit funds.

Mpumalanga Hawks spokesperson Captain Dineo Lucy Sekgotodi said joint search and seizure operation were also in Gauteng on the same day by members of Gauteng Hawks, Technical Operation Management Services, Sap’ K9 Endangered species, and Environmental Management Inspectors from the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries.

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She said during their search of the Sunnyridge Primrose property in Germiston, they discovered a Volvo motor vehicle fitted with hidden compartment with a black sports bag containing suspected rhino horn shavings.

“A small room was discovered next to garage suspected to be used for rhino horn processing whereby a large band saw, scales, grinders, grinding discs and a hand scanner commonly used to detect microchips [and] various financial documents and digital devices were found and seized for further investigation,” Sekgotodi said.

Stolen diesel

In another Mpumalanga police takedown on Friday, three Mozambican nationals between the ages of 25 and 28 were nabbed with suspected stolen diesel.

According to provincial police spokesperson Brigadier Selvy Mohlala, members of the Middelburg Crime Prevention Unit Police were on routine patrol at Vaalbank Village next to Black Watlo mine when they spotted a suspicious vehicle.

They stopped and searched the Toyota Hilux with three male occupants inside and found a total 25 litre plastic containers filled with diesel.

Neither of the men could explain possession of the 24 containers or produce proof of purchase and they were all arrested and their vehicle was seized.

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