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Operation Blood Orange: Two suspects evade arrest in poaching money-laundering sting

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(Getty Images)

- **Two people accused of money laundering avoided capture during a take-down operation in Mpumalanga.**
- **They are accused of paying money into accounts of Kruger National Park field rangers and their families in return for tactical information for rhino poaching syndicates.**
- **The Hawks have urged the pair to turn themselves in.**

Two people accused of money laundering in relation to payments for information for poaching syndicates, have managed to avoid arrest for two weeks following a take-down operation.

In the early hours of 2 December, the Hawks arrested nine suspects in Mpumalanga.

However, Martin Prince Lekhuleni, 37, and Eunice Lekhuleni, 24, escaped during the "multi-disciplinary integrated take-down operation, named 'Blood Orange'," said Hawks spokesperson Captain Dineo Lucy Sekgotodi.

After an investigation by the Hawks, KPMG, the international audit, tax and advisory firm, was appointed to probe the suspects' financial affairs.

The arrests followed KPMG's inquiry into the transferring of funds in and out of the suspects' bank accounts, said Sekgotodi.

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Martin Lekhuleni allegedly paid money into the accounts of Kruger National Park field rangers and their families in return for tactical information that was used to aid poaching syndicates.

Joyce Maluleke, 51, Stephinah Mbhombi, 52, Oters Maluleke, 27, Miyelani Maluleke, 29, and 22-year-old Nkhesane Maluleke – family members of former Kruger National Park field ranger Chikwa David Maluleke – were released on R5 000 bail each.

Thandi Makhuvele, 37, Alsina Mkhonto, 61, Ignatia Mnisi, 36, Given Mzimba, 28 – family members of former Kruger National Park field ranger Solly Ubisi – were released on R3 000 bail each.

The case has been postponed to 27 January 2023 in order to join the suspects together and for further investigation, said Sekgotodi.

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2:20

South Africa: More than 30 orphaned young rhinos relocated to keep them safe

Between January and December this year, 259 rhinos were poached from South African game farms and parks, according to South African National Parks. Around 82 of these rhinos were poached from the Kruger National Park, which is home to the largest population of rhinos in the world.

Provincial head of the Hawks, Major General Zodwa Mokoena, urged the two fugitives to turn themselves in to investigating officers, and said that evading the law would not aid their case.

Sekgotodi said anyone with information regarding the investigation should contact the Hawks' investigating officer, Colonel Danie Hall, on 071 481 3281.