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Hunt for suspected rhino poacher who fled on foot after abandoning a package near George

The remains of a de-horned rhino were found at a Groot Brak River game farm.
File image/REUTERS/Siphiwe Sibeko

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Cape Town - The Oudtshoorn stock theft and endangered species unit is investigating a case of illegal hunting of endangered species after a rhino horn was seized by police on the N2 near George on Wednesday.

Following a high-speed pursuit with police, a car reportedly stopped just outside of George and dumped a package containing a rhino horn.

Police spokesperson, Christopher Spies, said further investigation led police to a game farm near Groot Brak River where the remains of a rhino were found.

“Preliminary information indicates that police members were in pursuit of a vehicle after it went through a roadblock on the N2 at the entrance to George.

“During the chase, the vehicle stopped just outside George and dropped a package. Upon further investigation, members discovered that the package contained a rhino horn which was then seized.

“This vehicle was later pulled over in the Eastern Cape, but the occupant fled on foot. The search for the suspects is ongoing. No arrests have been made yet,” he said.

Anyone with information that could lead to the arrest of the perpetrators has been urged to contact the police.

The horn is believed to be from a rhino from the Botlierskop Private Game Reserve outside Little Brak River.

Botlierskop Private Game Reserve declined to comment on Thursday.

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment in February reported a decline in rhino poaching from 451 in 2021 to 448 in 2022.

“In 2022, 124 rhino were killed in the Kruger National Park. No rhino were poached in any other national park. The number of rhino poached in the Kruger National Park represents a 40% decrease compared with those killed for their horn 2021.

“In total across the country private rhino owners lost 86 rhino. The number of rhino killed in the past year represents a slight decline (of 3) compared to the 451 rhino poached in South Africa in 2021.

“The steady decline in rhino poaching in national parks is related to the relentless war that has been waged by our fearsome anti-poaching machinery as well as a comprehensive dehorning programme. This year’s outcome shows that collaboration between conservation authorities, the South African Police Services, revenue authorities and international agencies work,” the department said.

Cape Times