

Wanted rhino poaching suspect arrested in KaBokweni

An alleged rhino poacher, who has been on the run from authorities since 2019, was rearrested in KaBokweni.

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Odus Maluleke (47). > Photo: Mpumalanga police

One of the most wanted suspects in Mpumalanga rhino poaching cases was recently rearrested in KaBokweni after evading authorities since 2019.

A Mozambican national, Odis Maluleke (47), was taken into police custody on Saturday May 6 after the police had received information on his whereabouts from a few whistle-blowers.



According to a provincial police spokesperson, Brigadier Selvy Mohlala, the Skukuza Stock Theft Unit was assisted by members of the Tactical Response Team (TRT) in apprehending Maluleke.

Mohlala said Maluleke and three other men were initially arrested on July 20, 2015, while trying to enter the Kruger National Park (KNP) through the Kruger Gate.

Their car was searched and the gate's security guards discovered a hunting rifle, 12 live rounds of ammunition as well as an axe.

The Skukuza police were called and arrested the four. They later appeared in court, where Maluleke was granted R20 000 bail. However, while his co-accused continued to appear in court when required, Maluleke did not, and a warrant for his arrest was issued.

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Mohlala said that on February 15, 2019, four suspects were arrested after the police and SANParks officials had received information about poaching. It is unclear where the men were arrested, however, Maluleke was among them.

The three other suspects, who were South Africans, were not the same men initially arrested with Maluleke in 2015. Mohlala said that during the arrest, the suspects were found in possession of two rhino horns, a hunting rifle, five live rounds of ammunition and a knife.

During the subsequent court appearance following the arrest, Maluleke's three co-accused were each granted R3 000 bail. Mohlala said that while the Mozambican was initially denied bail, he was later granted R30 000 bail. He failed to show up for his next court appearance again, and yet another warrant for his arrest was issued.

The police had been in pursuit of Maluleke until he was found and caught on Saturday. Mohlala said Maluleke appeared in the Mhala Regional Court on Monday May 8. The case was postponed to May 18 for further investigation. He remains behind bars.

Meanwhile, the cases against the other suspects that had previously been arrested with Maluleke are still proceeding. This excludes the case against one of the men who was arrested with him in 2019, as he had died on January 25, 2021. It is unclear what the cause of this suspect's death was.