

DAILY MAVERICK

STOCKPILE HIT

Hawks close in on North West rhino horn burglars – second heist suspect arrested



Rhinos on a Klerksdorp farm on 8 September 2016. (Photo: Gallo Images / Rapport / Conrad Bornman)



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05 Jul 2023 0

The second arrest by a crack team comes after a suspect appeared in court in connection with the theft said to bear the hallmark of an inside job.

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The Hawks have arrested a second suspect allegedly linked to the stockpile hit at the North West Parks Board headquarters in Mafikeng last week.

According to a *Daily Maverick* source, the suspect was apprehended in a planned operation near Brits at about 9pm on Tuesday.

On Wednesday morning the arrest was confirmed by a senior SAPS officer who did not want to be identified. He told *Daily Maverick*: “Full details will be released as soon as the report is received from the investigating officer.”

According to a source close to the investigation, a specialised team comprising investigators from the Hawks Tactical Operations Management Section (TOMS), Crime Intelligence, SAPS Tactical Intervention Units, as well as private security companies, has been working round the clock to crack the case.

“They are exploring all possible leads, and last night the team was able to positively identify their target and execute a planned, tactical operation. The suspect has been positively identified as one of the suspects involved in the break-in and theft of horns,” said the source, who asked not to be named.

Fifty-one rhino horns were reported stolen from the agency’s security vault in the early hours of Monday, 26 June, after burglars broke into the main vault at the security-patrolled offices between 1.30am and 2.15am.

The break-in was described as a well-planned operation executed with military precision, and bore the hallmark of an inside job.

Read more in Daily Maverick: [‘Kick in the gut’ – thieves escape with 51 rhino horns from North West Parks Board HQ](#)

Camera footage shows two people with their faces covered. They allegedly accessed the resource security offices on the first floor after cutting wires on the distribution board, disabling the alarms and removing security cameras.

The burglars left the premises carrying the horns in large woven polypropylene packaging bags through a back gate, the locks of which had been cut.

Crackdown

Last Thursday the Hawks received information which led them to a house in Boitekong, Rustenburg, where a Malawian alleged to have been involved in the heist was arrested.

“Five vehicles believed to have been used in the commission of the crime were confiscated for further investigation,” the Hawks spokesperson said.



Seized rhino horns at the Department of Wildlife and National Parks headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 20 August 2018. (Photo: EPA-EFE / Fazry Ismail)

On Monday, *Daily Maverick* reported that Elias Manganda (40) appeared in the Mmabatho Magistrates’ Court on 3 July, where he was charged with business robbery. The case was remanded until Friday for further investigation and a bail application.

As many as 15 people were believed to have been involved in the heist.

Read more in Daily Maverick: [Suspect in court after Hawks make breakthrough on theft of 51 rhino horns from North West Parks Board](#)

According to our own investigation, three security guards were on duty at Heritage House when the break-in occurred.

Sebaka Mooketsi, North West Tourism's chief marketing officer and spokesperson for North West Parks Board, said she could not comment on the security arrangements while the investigation was under way.

"The North West Parks and Tourism Board urges members of the media and the public in general to afford law enforcement agencies the opportunity to investigate this matter."

An anonymous report seen by *Daily Maverick* claims it took almost eight hours for the police to arrive after they were summoned. "Unfortunately SAPS took almost 8 hours to arrive at the scene, after the CEO had to phone Genl. Asaneng to get a response. So much for the golden hour. This is a huge setback for NWP," it reads.

Pieter Nel, the parks board's acting chief conservation officer, said the incident was "like a kick in the gut".

Nel confirmed that of the 51 horns, 14 were very large specimens from mortalities, with the balance made up of smaller horns and trimmed pieces from dehorning operations at North West Parks.

He added that before the robbery there had been plans in place to move the horns to a safer location. Their total weight was "somewhere between 70kg and 90kg".

"The robbery was discovered by one of our investigators when he arrived at the offices. Apparently he responded to an alarm, and when he saw the scene he contacted the resource security manager.

The stolen rhino horns are yet to be recovered. **DM**

This developing story may be updated.