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## Endangered-plants poacher behind bars for a decade

*A 42-year-old man was sentenced to a decade in prison and convicted on three counts of restricted activities Involving specially protected species.*

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**A 42-year-old man has been sentenced to a decade behind bars at the Kuruman Regional Court after being nabbed with 2 850 endangered and protected plants worth more than R9 million.**

Stanford Hatidani was convicted on three counts of restricted activities involving specially protected species, protected species, and indigenous species in terms of the Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act 9 of 2009.

National Prosecuting Authority spokesperson Mojalefa Senokoatsane said that on June 14, 2022, the State's first witness, an ambulance driver, out of concern, stopped at a bakkie and a truck standing next to the N14 highway between Kuruman and Kathu.

"On enquiring whether everything was okay, he became suspicious when he saw plants being loaded from the bakkie to the truck and alerted the Kuruman neighbourhood watch and the SAPS. On entering Kuruman, both the bakkie and truck were pulled over by the neighbourhood watch and the SAPS. On further investigation, a total amount of 2 850 endangered and protected plants were found, which included five different species with a combined international value of over R9m.

“The accused, being the driver of the truck, tried to downplay the situation by indicating that he was only assisting the people of a broken-down bakkie to transport these plants to Johannesburg. The accused was arrested, and he pleaded not guilty to all the charges conferred against him, disputing that the truck he was driving was carrying illegal plants,” said Senokoatsane.

During the trial, regional court prosecutor advocate Sherlaine Smith emphasised the impact of the offences on nature conservation and the communities where these plants are poached. Smith further argued that these offences are of such a serious nature that the legislature deemed it necessary to have a specific act relating to such offences – the Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act 9 of 2009.

“In strengthening the State’s case the prosecutor provided the court with expert and compelling statements from botanist and zoologist Adam Harrower as evidence that indicated that the accused were very specific about the species he was targeting; that from the large size and great age of these plants the accused was to sell them for immediate commercial gain. The astounding quantity of large trophy plants collected indicated no restraint or ecological sensitivity, which shows a complete disregard for nature and the law.”

The prosecution also argued that the people and vehicles involved involved in the offences along with the planning showed the sophisticated manner in which the poachers operate, and that the plants were to be taken out of the country once they had reached Johannesburg.

“The main objective of poachers of these protected plants is for them to reach the international market where it is seen as status symbols. Advocate Smith continued by emphasising the fact that there is a high prevalence of poaching of these plants in the Northern Cape and are increasing in numbers at a shockingly high rate,” said Senokoatsane.

**Cape Times**