



Compiled by [Devina Haripersad](#)

Senior Business/Finance journalist

3 minute read

27 Dec 2023

06:42 pm

US rhino trade activist arrested for possession of horns without documentation after 16-hour raid

The Texan faces accusations of violating South African law after several carcasses were found that had no paperwork.



Image: iStock

A controversial figure in the [rhino](#) horn trade debate was arrested last week after more than 20 rhino carcasses were found at his game farm in [Limpopo](#).

The arrest of Derek Lewitton was made by the [Hawk](#), after they investigated his Harmony game farm for more than 16 hours.

During the searches, members of the Hawks discovered multiple rhino carcasses missing their horns. Lewitton was arrested in accordance with South African law, which advises that if one encounters a rhino in the wild, whether deceased from natural causes or otherwise, it is recommended to refrain from removing the horns.

ALSO READ: [Tragedy at Tshwane's reserve as rhinos get electrocuted](#)

Instead, individuals should promptly report the incident to both the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Department of Nature Conservation.

[READ MORE](#)

[SA delivered over 500 Christmas babies](#)

Lewitton faces accusations of violating this law after several carcasses were found that had no horns and no paperwork.

Texas

Lewitton is a US national who hails from Texas. He is the author of several papers that seek to redefine the options for legal trade in rhino horn and has served in a voluntary capacity as the legal advisor and CITES expert for the IWMC Wildlife Conservation Trust.

Hawks spokesperson Brigadier Hulani Mashaba [told News24](#) that in addition to the 26 unreported rhino carcasses uncovered on the premises, the Hawks also came across a safe in the main farmhouse containing 10 unmarked rhino horns lacking the necessary documentation.

Mashaba also confirmed that they retrieved several illegal firearms and rounds of ammunition during the search.

Lewitton's laptop and cellphone were also confiscated.

Court appearance

The American national appeared at the Namakgale Magistrate's Court on Wednesday, where he was formally charged.

The matter was postponed to 3 January 2024 for a formal bail application.

ALSO READ: [Two poachers shot dead in Kruger National Park](#)

In 2021, [in an interview with Aljazeera](#), Lewitton explained that roughly half of South Africa's rhino population resides on private lands. He said that owners of these sanctuaries face annual costs in the millions for funding rangers, security infrastructure, veterinary care, and extra feeding during droughts.

Lewitton expressed concern, stating, "The families engaged in this crucial work are running low on funds. Without legal horn trade, they desperately need alternative ways to finance their efforts and sustain their operations."