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# Forestry, Fisheries and Environment on rhino poaching

27 Feb 2024

## KwaZulu-Natal carried the brunt of rhino poaching in 2023, says Creecy

During 2023, 499 rhinos were poached across South Africa, 406 were killed on state properties and 93 on privately owned parks/reserves/farms. This was an increase (of 51) in comparison to 448 rhinos poached in 2022.

“The pressure again has been felt in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province with Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park facing the brunt of poaching cases losing 307 of the total national poaching loss. This is the highest poaching loss within this province. While KZN recorded 49 arrests and 13 firearms seized, multi-disciplinary teams continue to work tirelessly in an attempt to slow this relentless pressure,” said Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Ms Barbara Creecy.

Kruger National Park (KNP) recorded a 37% decrease from 2022 with a total of 78 poached in 2023. No rhinos were poached in any other National Parks.

“As part of the government’s poverty relief program there are a number of fence monitors employed from neighboring communities that patrol the western boundary fence of the KNP and report fence breakages, illegal tracks and people entering the KNP as well as animals escaping from the KNP,” said Minister Creecy.

The Minister also commended the work performed by the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation – Hawks - in several regional and transnational engagements to enhance the government’s integrated approach to combat wildlife trafficking. Responsible partnerships between the public and private sectors, and the financial and transporting sectors remains critical in combating international wildlife trafficking. The approach is not exclusive to South Africa but is followed within the region and transnationally. Working with the transit and end user countries in South-East Asia, especially with the People’s Republic of China, Singapore, Qatar, Malaysia and Vietnam.

In relation to rhino prosecutions, verdicts were handed down in 36 cases of which 35 resulted in guilty verdicts and one in a not guilty verdict. The cases resulted in the conviction of 45 accused rhino poachers/rhino horn traffickers with a conviction rate of 97%.

The integrated work of the law enforcement agencies, including the SAPS, Hawks, SANParks, Environmental Enforcement Fusion Centre, the Environmental Management Inspectorate or Green Scorpions, customs officials, provincial park authorities, and the National Prosecuting Authority, has resulted in the following successful convictions:

An accused, a former field ranger, was arrested in KNP after he killed a rhino with his R1 rifle and failed to report the incident. He initially denied that he discharged his firearm, and he replaced the ammunition with non-issued ammunition, but ballistic evidence linked his issued firearm with the crime scene. During the trial he alleged that the rhino charged him. His claim that the rhino charged him, was not accepted by the court. He was convicted for carrying out restricted activities with endangered or protected species and was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

In KZN, five accused were convicted for the killing of one rhino; conspiracy to hunt a rhino, possession of firearms and ammunition, possession of a firearm with the intent to commit an offence. The accused were found in a motor vehicle with hunting equipment and the DNA on the equipment linked to the DNA of the rhino. The firearms were ballistically linked to the crime scene as well. They were sentenced to an effective imprisonment term of 10 years.

In Gauteng, an accused was convicted for the possession of two rhino horns, which was found inside a bag in the vehicle he was travelling in and was sentenced to an effective period of imprisonment of 5 years.

The Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Environmental Working Group (EWG) meet on a biannual basis to share best practice in the investigation and prosecution of environmental crime, to address challenges experienced, to foster closer collaboration between the provincial conservation authorities dealing with wildlife trafficking cases and to help identify repeat offenders moving around the country in furtherance of implementing the NISCWT strategy.

Further to this, real time information pertaining to arrest is shared, which enhance collaboration between prosecutors and the law enforcement agencies significantly. A national environmental cases audit has been conducted to establish the number of cases being dealt with by the NPA. A consolidated list of investigating instructions pertaining to rhino and abalone cases has been developed to ensure that comprehensive investigations are requested.

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) in the 2023/24 financial year embarked on a consultative process to revise both the Black and White Rhinoceros Biodiversity Management Plans (BMP) in line with the provision of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act.

The revision of the BMP aims to address the needs of both black and white rhino, provide a strategic approach and detailed action plan to conserving rhino in South Africa and for engaging with range States to the north. It consolidates previous work at policy and planning level on rhino management into a single integrated tool in order to usher in a whole of society approach in the interest of both the rhinos and the people of South Africa. The revised draft BMP will be published in a Government Gazette for public participation in the near future.

\*\* Members of the public can report any suspicious activities around wildlife to its environmental crime hotline which is 0800 205 005 or the SAPS number 10111.

To access a recording of Minister Creecy's statement, click below:

For media inquiries contact:

Peter Mbelengwa

**Editor's note:**

The provincial and national breakdown for 2023 (in comparison to 2021 and 2022) is as follows:

Provinces and national parks	2021	2022	2023
SANParks	209	124	78
Gauteng	2	2	0
Limpopo	38	25	59
Mpumalanga	39	21	7
North West	32	24	12
Eastern Cape	0	0	17
Free State	24	4	0
Northern Cape	1	4	0
KwaZulu-Natal	102	244	325
Western Cape	4	0	1
Total	451	448	499

Various combined interventions can be attributed to the decrease of rhino poached at KNP in 2023:

- Strong collaboration between external stakeholders permanently based in KNP and attending to various Wildlife Crime cases such as the Skukuza Stock Theft and Endangered Species Unit, Skukuza SAPS and SAPS forensic teams.
- An extensive and ongoing dehorning programme which focuses on the dehorning of all rhino in core areas.
- The continued implementation of the KNP Ranger Services Integrity Management Plan which is a holistic approach that assesses the drivers and dynamics of corruption, and then addresses these with a comprehensive set of actions that focuses on building individual integrity and organisational resilience to corruption.
- Improved access control through the installation of Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras and gate cameras.
- Radar detection systems that remotely track any illegal entry by poachers on foot into the KNP.

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