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Poaching Increases in South Africa

Thursday 29 February 2024

Rhino poaching in South Africa rose by 10% in 2023 versus the previous year. While the numbers came as no surprise, it is a stark reminder that there is still a lot of work to do to overcome the rhino poaching crisis!

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RHINO POACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA - 2023



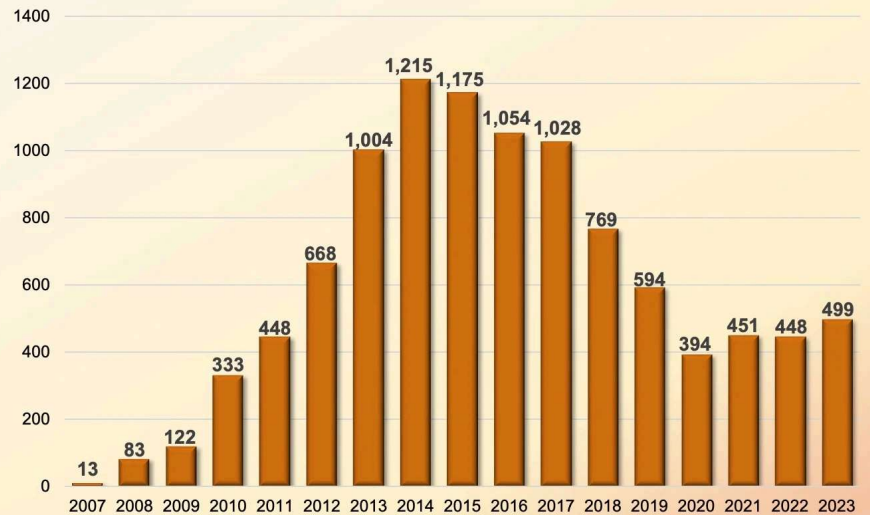
499
rhino poached
in South Africa



10%
increase on 2022



60%
of poaching was
in KwaZulu-Natal



Source: South Africa Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment



Updated rhino poaching statistics for the whole of 2023 have been released by South Africa's Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE).

The initial take away from the high-level numbers is that rhino poaching has increased in the past twelve months. 448 rhinos were poached in 2022, but that number has risen by 51 to 499 for 2023. This is a concerning trend and means we are still losing rhinos at a rate of more than one per day.

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) was once again the province hit hardest by poaching, with 307 rhinos killed in KZN, making the region responsible for over 60% of the total losses.

Given the number of orphans received by our project partners The Zululand Rhino Orphanage over the past twelve months (the only dedicated rhino orphanage facility in the region), these numbers are not a surprise to us. They are however disappointing and deeply concerning.

"We have spoken about this for too long now, lets stop talking and take action, make decisions and save a species that we have managed to push to the brink of extinction twice in one life time."

Karen Odendaal
COO, Zululand Conservation Trust

Kruger National Park recorded a 37% decline in poaching, and while a decline is encouraging, it is difficult to determine whether this is due to improved mechanisms within the park, fewer rhinos left to poach or gangs moving on to easier targets in KZN.

We once again implore the South African government to share not only the number of rhinos poached but also the rhinos poached as percentage of the overall population.

Private rhino custodians once again showed how vital they are to the future of the species, losing just 93 animals, compared with 411 rhinos killed on state owned properties. This comparison is put into sharp focus when we remember that over half of South Africa's rhinos live on privately owned land, highlighting the monumental work being done by private rhino custodians.

36 cases relating to rhino poaching were heard in South Africa in 2023, with 35 guilty verdicts returned. This saw 45 poachers convicted; however, the length of sentences was not provided in the Government press release. While poacher convictions are encouraging, it is important to remember that in many cases these foot-soldiers are easily replaced by the criminal syndicates they work for. Until we start dismantling these organised criminal gangs, we face an uphill battle.

We applaud the countless people doing incredible work for rhinos across South Africa, both in the private sphere and within state structures. However the numbers show that once again the private sector is bearing much of the burden of responsibility, while the state desperately needs to start pulling its weight.

"We should not be fooled by the lower poaching numbers. The recent census results from Kruger Park clearly demonstrate the impacts of 12 years of constant plunder of the rhinos. There are simply too few left for poachers to locate easily. And as such, one rhino lost is of major consequence when the population has been reduced to such critical numbers.

The figures also show the importance of legitimate NGOs and their supporters, working around the clock to buy time for the rhinos. And of course, the immense value of honest field rangers and private protected areas. Without these allies, the rhinos would be in a much worse situation.

All we can do on the ground, is buy time. We need higher intervention, from the international political arena, to address the causal factors and corruption, within the state-owned parks networks.

If we do not keep up the pressure, poachers will inevitably run out of rhinos and simply target the next valuable species. As is already evident with pangolins and lions."

Craig Spencer

Founder of the Black Mambas all female Anti-Poaching Unit

HELPING RHINOS' IMPACT

The surge of rhino poaching in KZN shows no signs of abating, meaning that our work in the region is more important than ever. Helping Rhinos is proud to have the only dedicated rhino orphanage facility in the Province - The [Zululand Rhino Orphanage](#) (ZRO) has rescued more orphans in the past year than at any other time in its existence, and with KZN firmly marked as the global epicentre for poaching, we don't see this trend slowing any time soon. ZRO has a Memorandum of Understanding with Ezemvelo Wildlife (the entity responsible for the running of the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park (HiP) to take in all orphaned rhino calves that have been rescued. We are steadfast in our efforts to maintain this vital facility and provide a safe space for the rehabilitation and care of these traumatised orphans.

Away from KZN we will continue to support Ranger patrols both on the ground, such as the [Black Mambas](#) all female anti-poaching unit, and in the air such as our '[Eyes in the Sky](#)' programme, while researching ground breaking technology to make the protection of rhino and their natural environment an ever more effective and efficient process.

"It is concerning to see that the number of rhino poached in South Africa in 2023 (499) has risen compared to 2022 (448). While we are still in a much better position than we were ten years ago when 1,215 rhino were lost to poachers, it is a stark reminder we still have a lot of work to do to combat these heinous crimes that cause suffering and death to more than one rhino every single day. It is concerning to see that KwaZulu-Natal remains the global epicentre of poaching. This fact makes the importance of our work with Zululand Rhino Orphanage, the only dedicated rhino rescue and rehabilitation facility in the region, of increasingly critical importance."

Simon Jones

Founder and CEO, Helping Rhinos

HOW YOU CAN HELP

We know that change is possible, and with just three rhinos poached in the last four years in areas supported by Helping Rhinos we are making progress. This is only possible thanks to your support, and the work it enables us to do creating and protecting [Rhino Strongholds](#).

Please continue to support us and enable us to keep helping rhinos.

THANK YOU

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