

South Africa sees marked rise in rhino poaching

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South Africa has recorded a significant increase in the killing of rhinos by poachers. The uptick comes despite government efforts to crack down on the illegal trade in horns.



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Security has been tightened around the Kruger National Park, but poachers have gravitated to private and regional reserves instead

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The [South African](#) Environment Ministry said on Tuesday that the number of [rhinos](#) poached in the country had risen by more than 10% in 2023 compared with the previous year.

International trade of rhino horn is prohibited but rhino horn continues to be smuggled to Asia, where it is highly valued, especially in Vietnam and China.

How the figures broke down

The ministry said 499 black and white rhinoceroses were killed in 2023, mostly in state-run parks, compared with 448 the previous year.

The southeastern province of KwaZulu-Natal recorded the majority of cases with 325 killings, mostly poached in the province's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park — Africa's oldest reserve — where 307 dead animals were discovered.

Kruger National Park, which borders Mozambique, actually recorded a 37% decrease in rhinos slaughtered in 2023, a total of 78. Security at the park, a magnet for tourists, was tightened in recent years after a drastic fall in the rhinoceros population.

No rhinos were poached in any other national parks, with regional and private reserves and farms increasingly targeted by poachers.

Environment Minister Barbara Creecy said law enforcement agencies had arrested 49 suspected poachers in KwaZulu-Natal last year. Across the whole country, 45 poachers and hunters were convicted by courts.

"Multi-disciplinary teams continue to work tirelessly in an attempt to slow this relentless pressure," Creecy said.

The increase comes despite South Africa saying last year that it had detected a slight decline in the number of rhinos killed for their horns in the first half of 2023. [Poaching had been on the rise](#) after the easing of lockdown curbs because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why are rhinos being hunted?

Poaching is driven by demand from Asia, where the horns are used for their [supposed therapeutic effect in traditional medicine](#). The illicit global market sees rhino horn fetch a price by weight rivaling that of gold and cocaine.

Some 15,000 rhinos, a sizeable majority of the nearly 23,300 across the African continent, live in South Africa.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) said it was particularly concerned about the increased numbers of poaching in KwaZulu-Natal.

"They show that even if poaching declines for a few years, it can flare up again at any time as long as demand is not noticeably and sustainably curbed," said Katharina Hennemuth, an expert on poaching and illegal trade at WWF Germany.

"The increase in poaching shows that the situation of African rhinos remains precarious," said Hennemuth.

rc/msh (dpa, AFP, Reuters)
