

Kruger rangers shoot four suspected rhino poachers in four days



Forensic sampling on a poached rhino carcass in Kruger.

Four suspected rhino poachers died in two separate incidents in South Africa's internationally renowned Kruger National Park this month (June).

The park on South Africa's eastern boundary is bordered by Mozambique and Zimbabwe and for the first time was last year overtaken by KwaZulu-Natal as the apparent venue of choice for armed poachers seeking rhino horn. Figures released in February by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment have it Kruger lost 78 rhino to poachers last year with KwaZulu-Natal, mainly in its Hluhluwe/iMfolozi game reserve, losing 307 of the Big Five species in the same period.

On 14 June in the Kruger, patrolling rangers "made contact" at an unspecified location with suspected poachers armed with an axe, "a high calibre rifle" and "poaching equipment". A suspect was fatally wounded in the contact with an unknown number of other suspects managing to elude the patrol, SANParks said.

Four days later ranger came across another armed group of suspected rhino poachers. The contact and ensuing firefight saw three suspects fatally wounded. A heavy calibre rifle, ammunition and unspecified poaching equipment was confiscated at the scene.

Elaborating on the incidents, SANParks Head of Communication JP Louw said the incidents, one shortly after the other, again highlight the dangerous conditions facing Kruger rangers. "Incursions on the eastern boundary are relentless and anti-poaching units are under pressure as it addresses

these. SANParks is also exploring interventions which include community mobilisation and support to push back against the threats poaching presents,” a statement has him saying.