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## KwaZulu-Natal becomes new hotspot for rhino poaching

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Of the 231 rhinos that were killed in South Africa in the first half of the year, 143 were in KwaZulu-Natal.  
Laila Majiet/City Press

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Despite declining national [rhino poaching](#) statistics, KwaZulu-Natal is becoming a new hotspot for these illegal activities. The Hluhluwe Imfolozi Game Reserve, in particular, is seeing a surge in poaching incidents, with rhino horns being targeted by poachers at an alarming rate.

This was according to forestry, fisheries and the environment minister **Barbara Creecy**, who also revealed that in the first six months of 2023, 231 rhinos were killed in South Africa.

This, Creecy said, represents a decline of 28 animals killed for their horn compared to the same period last year.

However, she noted that the numbers demonstrated a persistent pattern of poaching shifting from the Kruger National Park to the KwaZulu-Natal reserves.

In a statement, she said:

Of the 231 rhinos that were killed in South Africa in the first half of the year, 143 were in KwaZulu-Natal.

**READ: [War on rhino poaching – a never-ending bloody battle](#)**

The department of forestry, fisheries, and the environment is working with law enforcement agencies to tackle poaching in the province.

“Among these has been the establishment of a tactical operations joint control centre, which now facilitates the SA Police Service (SAPS) deployments to Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park,” Creecy said.

The minister added that the department allocated R40 million to repair and replace the boundary fence around the game reserve, which was often breached and allowed wild animals to escape to nearby communities.

South Africa saw a 4% increase in rhino poaching in the first half of 2022 compared to the same period last year, according to the department. A total of 259 rhinos were poached between January and June 2022.

Creecy said that the demand for rhino horns remained a constant threat to rhino populations. She stressed the importance of collaboration between law enforcement agencies, including the SAPS, the Hawks and the National Prosecuting Authority.

The minister mentioned:

An important development in strengthening the collaboration between these role players aims to break the illicit value chain of wildlife trafficking in South Africa and beyond its borders.

Government was committed to directing law enforcement resources and mobilising public support to address the threat wildlife trafficking poses to national security and biodiversity, Creecy added.

**READ: [Rhino poachers increasingly targeting private reserves, says minister](#)**

KwaZulu-Natal has always been affected by the current poaching epidemic, but the intensity has increased in recent years, according to Emma Pereira, communications manager of Save the Rhino International.

Save the Rhino actively combats rhino poaching by working with partners in Africa and Asia to protect all five rhino species and increase their populations.

Pereira said:

In 2022, more rhinos were poached in KwaZulu-Natal than in Kruger National Park, which had previously been the hardest-hit area. The poaching crisis is driven by consumer demand for illegal rhino horn products, especially in Vietnam and China. The rhino horn is seen as a symbol of wealth and status and is sometimes used in traditional Chinese medicine practices.

The fight against rhino poaching has evolved due to necessity. More efficient methods and technical advancements are being used by poachers, according to Dr Matthew Schurch, a wildlife specialist at Humane Society International/Africa.

“Unfortunately, rhino poaching has become more militarised. Poachers are better armed, which necessitates better weapons for rangers, effectively turning game rangers into soldiers,” he said.