

Poacher gets 16 years after 2020 Kruger National Park rhino killings

Ranger evidence, expert reports and bloodstain analysis secured the conviction of a man involved in a 2020 rhino poaching incident.



Bethuel Baloyi. Photo: NPA

The Skukuza Regional Court has sentenced Bethuel Baloyi (28) to 16 years' direct imprisonment for a series of poaching-related offences committed in 2020. [Mpumalanga News reports](#) he was sentenced yesterday.

Charges and conviction

According to Mpumalanga National Prosecuting Authority spokesperson Monica Nyuswa, the accused was convicted on multiple counts, including trespassing, killing two rhinos, possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number, possession of a firearm to commit an offence, possession of live ammunition, conspiracy to commit an offence and possession of a dangerous weapon.

Ranger encounter

“On March 28, 2020, rangers patrolling the Pretoriuskop section encountered three suspects carrying rifles and other weapons. The suspects were identified as Million Masilane, Bethuel Baloyi and Andries Baloyi, a Mozambican national. During the attempted arrest Baloyi pointed a firearm at the rangers, who opened fire, resulting in his death,” she says.

Discovery of carcasses

Nyuswa adds that the remaining suspects were arrested and found in possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number and live ammunition. A search of the surrounding area led to the discovery of two rhino carcasses. Baloyi and Masilane were initially granted bail.

Trial developments

Although the accused pleaded not guilty during trial, the state presented compelling evidence, including ranger testimony and expert reports confirming that bloodstains found on Baloyi's clothing matched those of a rhino.

“In 2023, Baloyi's co-accused, Masilane, was convicted and sentenced to an effective 16 years' imprisonment. Baloyi absconded following the postponement of the matter for judgment, leading the state to apply for a separation of trials. He was later rearrested in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve in KZN for a similar offence, which remains pending,” explains Nyuswa.

Sentencing breakdown

- 2 years – Trespassing
- 10 years – Killing two rhinos
- 5 years – Possession of a firearm
- 6 years – Possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number
- 5 years – Possession of a firearm to commit a crime
- 2 years – Possession of live ammunition
- 4 years – Conspiracy to commit an offence
- 1 year – Possession of a dangerous weapon

Some sentences were ordered to run concurrently, resulting in an effective 16 years' direct imprisonment. Baloyi was further declared unfit to possess a firearm.

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