

# KZN leads the fight against rhino poaching with a remarkable 68% decline



Innovative anti-poaching strategies lead to a remarkable 68% drop in rhino losses in KwaZulu-Natal.

Image: File / Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife

South Africa has reported a significant victory against rhino poaching in 2025, with national figures reflecting a 16% decline.

Leading the charge is KwaZulu-Natal, where poaching losses at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) dwindled by 68%.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (Ezemvelo) welcomed the encouraging 2025 national rhino poaching statistics, crediting Minister Willie Aucamp's statement on anti-poaching progress.

Rhino losses in the HiP notably dropped by 68% (from 198 in 2024 to 63 in 2025), reflecting a province-wide decrease from 232 to 97 total losses.

The entity said this reflects the most turnaround recorded in South Africa and positions KZN as a leading example of what is possible through decisive leadership, strategic partnerships, and sustained operational excellence.

Ezemvelo started 2026 strongly, recording zero rhino poaching incidents across the province in January — a first in a decade milestone.

This unprecedented achievement affirms that sustained, coordinated efforts against wildlife crime are succeeding.

Additionally, while the 2024 dehorning programme was an early deterrent, Ezemvelo's analysis confirms that the success in 2025 resulted from a far broader, integrated security architecture. The coordinated implementation of multiple measures, not a single intervention, enabled these results.

These include:

- Collaborative formalisation with private and community rhino owners has enabled real-time intelligence sharing and unified operational responses.
- Investment in advanced surveillance (cameras, sensors, drones) and aerial support strengthens rapid detection and reaction.
- Implementation of the Integrity Management Plan, including polygraph testing and internal controls, safeguards operations.
- Close cooperation with the SAPS, DPCI, the Green Scorpions, and prosecutors ensures evidence-led investigations and meaningful convictions.
- Sustained technical and financial support comes from partners like WWF, Save the Rhino International, Wildlife ACT, and the Peace Parks Foundation.
- Ezemvelo's success is further bolstered by broad societal support and strategic leadership partnerships.

Ezemvelo said King Misuzulu kaZwelithini supports wildlife conservation, including rhino protection. This partnership links conservation, traditional leadership, and community stewardship.

Religious leaders, notably UNyazi lweZulu of the Shembe Nazareth Baptist Church, also provided spiritual support, visiting HiP last year to support rangers and management.

The entity added that the contrast between KZN and other provinces teaches a key lesson: national declines are good, but poaching pressure moves geographically, demanding specific, intelligence-led responses.

The KZN model shows that combining deterrence, defence, integrity, and collaboration can stabilise and secure wildlife populations.

It also said it is willing to share its lessons and operational model nationally to support the National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (NISCWT) and broader government efforts.

“I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to our brave frontline staff, our conservation partners, traditional leadership, faith leaders, and the communities living alongside our protected areas. The fact that we recorded zero poaching incidents in January demonstrates what is possible when we stand united.

“While we are encouraged by the progress, the fight is far from over. These gains remain fragile and require sustained financial, political, and societal commitment. We stand ready to work with Minister Aucamp and all stakeholders to ensure that KwaZulu-Natal's rhinos, and South Africa's natural heritage, are secured for future generations,” said Ezemvelo CEO Sihle Mkhize.

## Provincial and national breakdown for 2023, 2024 and 2025

Provinces and national parks	2023	2024	2025
<b>SANParks (Kruger National Park)</b>	78	88	175
<b>Gauteng</b>	0	1	1
<b>Limpopo</b>	59	59	36
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	7	4	3
<b>North West</b>	12	18	21
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	17	4	5
<b>Free State</b>	0	6	9
<b>Northern Cape</b>	0	8	5
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	325	232	97
<b>Western Cape</b>	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>352</b>

Source: Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

Provincial and national breakdown for 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Image: Thobeka Ngema

Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Willie Aucamp, announced on Tuesday that rhino poaching and trafficking in the country declined by 16% overall in 2025 compared to 2024.

“From January to December 2025, 352 rhinos were poached in South Africa, with 266 being killed on state properties and 86 on privately owned parks, reserves, or farms. This was a decrease of 68 in comparison to 420 rhinos poached in 2024,” Aucamp said.

He said Mpumalanga was the province most severely affected by rhino poaching in 2025, with 178 animals lost — a significant rise from the 92 reported in 2024. The majority of these losses occurred in the Kruger National Park, which accounted for 175 poached rhino, representing a sharp increase of 87 animals compared to the 88 reported for the park in 2024.

He also said rhino poaching numbers in HiP dropped from 198 in 2024 to 63 in 2025.

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