

South Africa: Rhino Poaching Continues to Decrease



[Brent Stirton and African Parks](#)

A white rhino cow and calf (file photo).

South Africa continues to see a downward trend in rhino poaching, with the 2024 statistics showing that 499 rhinos were poached in 2023, compared to 420 last year -- a decrease of 79.

"As we intensify the fight against wildlife poaching, it is encouraging to see that the work of the rangers, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and other key role players is steadily gaining momentum," the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Dr Dion George, said on Thursday.

From January to December 2024, 420 rhinos were poached in South Africa, with 320 being killed on State properties and 100 on privately owned parks, reserves or farms.

"The hardest hit province continues to be KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), which lost 232 rhinos. However, this is a notable decline from the 325 that were lost in 2023.

"The significant reduction can largely be attributed to the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Dehorning Programme, which was implemented in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park from April to October 2024.

"The World Wide Fund for Nature-funded programme had an immediate impact, with monthly poaching numbers dropping from 35 in April to fewer than 10 per month between May and September 2024," the Minister said.

However, from October, the poaching syndicates adapted their tactics and began targeting dehorned rhinos, leading to a sudden spike in poaching incidents in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

In that month alone, the province lost 27 rhinos.

"Fortunately, the provincial anti-rhino poaching team responded swiftly, intercepting the new syndicate and preventing further losses. The considerable efforts resulted in the province ultimately achieving a 67% decline in rhino poaching over the eight months.

"Kruger National Park reported a total of 88 poached rhinos for 2024. This is 10 animals more than the 78 that were reported for Kruger National Park (KNP) during the same period in 2023.

"Up until the end of November 2024, rhino losses reported in the Kruger National Park stood at 67, but a significant escalation in rhino poaching activities was experienced during December 2024 and this has continued into January 2025," George said.

A total of 21 rhinos were reported poached in KNP during December 2024 and a further 17 were reported poached during January 2025.

The Minister said the escalation in rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park is of great concern.

Both the South African National Parks (SANParks) and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife continue to implement a number of actions and initiatives to counter the threats in the hotspot areas.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is focused on implementing their Rhino Guardianship Strategy, which also played a role in reducing poaching in the province. This strategy was initiated in August 2024.

"The Ezemvelo Integrity Implementation Plan was completed and approved for implementation; integrity assessments of Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park staff, by an independent service provider, commenced, and a Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park Integrity Management Plan was completed and approved for implementation. Polygraphing of 55 Ezemvelo rhino reserve managers was completed and polygraphing of 58 field staff was completed.

"We continue to see some very good convictions in relation to rhino related cases, with lengthy direct imprisonment terms in respect of cases related to rhino poaching, assisting in the poaching of rhino and trafficking of rhino horns.

"However, the time that it takes to finalise many of these cases does remain a concern and unfortunately where the suspects are released on bail, the data tell us that a large number of them continue to commit crimes (often relating to rhino poaching and / or horn trafficking).

"Accordingly, expediting these cases through courts, as well as vigorously opposing bail will result in safeguarding more rhinos," the Minister explained.

National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking

"The sentencing of Francis Kipampa in January this year (who was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, eight of which were suspended for five years), as one of the accused investigated in Project Blood Orange, sends out a strong message. Not only are we focusing on arresting those involved in poaching our rhino and trafficking the horn, but we are disrupting the higher up levels in the value chain.

"This project is an excellent example of the integrated and multi-disciplinary approach to investigating organised crime linked to wildlife and ensuring that we target corruption, money laundering and the financial crimes associated with these activities," he said.

The Minister said more of these focused investigations are needed, as government continues to implement the National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking.

"As we move into the second year of implementation of this strategy, our partnerships within government, with authorities in transit and destination countries as well as with the private sector and non-governmental organisations remain critical.

"We need to continue to integrate and focus our effort through our existing programmes and forums, including the Integrated Wildlife Zones Initiative, the work of the South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Taskforce Illegal Wildlife Trade Task Force and the various task teams residing under the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure Priority Committee on Wildlife Trafficking.

"We remain committed to the fight against rhino poaching and I believe that a renewed strengthening of our agreements and operational protocols with key countries should be our focus for 2025," the Minister said.