

Poachers struck and mowed down an adult white rhino cow in Mpumalanga's Mthethomusha Game Reserve.

Rhino poaching - not restricted to Zimbabwe

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WHILE SOUTH AFRICANS sat glued to their television sets rejoicing in Bafana Bafana's victory over the Congo on a Saturday in August last year, poachers struck and mowed down an adult white rhino cow in Mpumalanga's Mthethomusha Game Reserve. The tribally-owned reserve, which is situated approximately 40 kilometres from the provincial capital, is managed by the Mpumalanga Parks Board.

The carcass of the slain animal was discovered by a group of tourists out on a late afternoon game drive from the reserve's upmarket Bongani Mountain Lodge, and Parks Board field rangers said it appeared as if the game drive party had disturbed the poachers while they were still in the process of hacking off the animal's horns. The animal had been brought down by what appeared to be AK47 bullets, they said. It was the second rhino to be poached in Mpumalanga that month. Earlier, one had been killed in the Kruger National Park.

The next day, reports were received that a second rhino, an adult male bull, was also thought to have been wounded by a poacher's bullet in the brutal attack. On the Monday afternoon this rhino was darted and examined by a qualified vet. It was discovered, however, that the rhino had sustained a horn wound, probably in a fight with another animal.

The MPB has offered a R10 000 reward for information leading to the recovery of the stolen horn as well as a successful prosecution. The investigation, which is said to be at a sensitive stage, continues.



Conservationists examine the carcass of the white rhino poached in Mpumalanga earlier last year.



The bloody evidence of ruthless poachers.

HIGH-TECH CONSERVATION - MICRO-CHIPS USED TO PROTECT MPUMALANGA RHINOS

Would-be rhino poachers keen on exploiting illegally obtained rhino horn in Mpumalanga province could soon be stopped in their tracks, following a high-tech offensive launched by the Mpumalanga Parks Board. The provincial conservation agency, determined to make life difficult for poachers, is in the process of implanting tiny microchips into the horns and under the skins of rhinos on its reserves.

From these chips, information pertaining to each rhino, including chip numbers and genetic particulars, will be stored on a national computerised database. This will enable wildlife law enforcement officers to identify the origin of the rhino horn when investigating smuggling and poaching cases. The required data could be read by simply swiping a sophisticated sensor along the length of the horn.

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