

# KRUGER PARK **T**IMES

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## Shocking rise in rhino poaching

## Six new tuskers identified

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# Shocking rise in rhino poaching leads to formation of new unit

Ruthless and highly organised criminals are butchering South Africa's rhinos at an alarming and escalating rate.

It is not only the rate at which these animals are being killed but also the manner in which this happens that has many South Africans calling for more stringent action.

In a recent incident in the Kruger National Park (KNP), poachers hacked the horn from a rhino while it was still alive, leaving the animal to stumble about with its face mangled to a bloody mess until the traumatised animal was spotted by horrified tourists.

Since January, the country has lost almost 100 rhinos, with the Kruger National Park (KNP) being the hardest hit in terms of numbers at 33, followed by the North West Province at 18 and 12 from the Gauteng Province. The least affected province has been the Eastern Cape Province with a loss of only two rhinos. The provinces' protected areas lost 32 rhinos while the private sector lost 27 rhinos. Four black rhinos have also been poached.

The South African National Parks (SANParks) and South African

government is facing increasing pressure from the public and other stakeholders to stop the poaching. On the other hand, the criminals are highly organised and have vast resources including highly sophisticated technology at their disposal.

In response to the spiralling problem, public and privately-owned nature reserves and conservation agencies joined forces with environmental affairs minister, Buyelwa Sonjica, who has set up a National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit (NWCURU).

This unit consists of the SAPS Organised Crime Unit, SANParks Environmental Crime Unit, the Provincial Conservation Anti-Poaching Unit and prosecutors at a national and provincial level. It will function with extended powers to include the expertise of the national director of public prosecution to fast track successful prosecution of suspected poachers.

SANParks chief executive Dr David Mabunda, said, "This move by the minister will also enable the various conservation agencies, including privately-owned game reserves, to populate poaching incident reports and allow for

accurate national poaching statistics, something that is key to the appropriate management and eventual reduction of this problem."

Dr Mabunda said this means that very soon the country will be able to identify problematic areas more effectively and direct resources accordingly.

"We are dealing here with organised crime and hardened criminals linked to notorious syndicates that the SAPS and Interpol are also looking for. We know that our combined efforts will reap fruitful results in the near future and SANParks stays committed to making every effort to wipe out this assault that is threatening our natural heritage."

The KNP is home to between 9,000 and 12,000 white rhinos, a large percentage of the approximately 19,000-strong South African population. Between 580 and 650 black rhinos of the country's population of 1,670 black rhinos are also found in Kruger. The other national parks with rhino populations collectively have an estimated 124 white rhinos and 107 black rhinos.

South Africa has seen an escalating assault on its rhino populations

in the last three years, with the first alarming spike in 2008 with the loss of 83 rhinos, a sharp rise from the mere 13 rhinos lost the previous year. South Africa lost a further 122 rhinos in 2009. This is the highest level of poaching for rhino horn that has ever been experienced by the country.

Thus far 25 suspected poachers have been arrested, with 17 having been arrested in the KNP, five in Gauteng and three in Mpumalanga.

Dr Mabunda said it is important for South Africans to be vigilant everywhere in the country because this is a problem that is escalating throughout the world and not only a problem in Kruger, as is the impression that seems to be coming through.

It must be understood that not only does the KNP house the majority of rhinos resident in any one property in the country, but it also holds about 300km of the eastern international border of the country. This makes it easier for such criminals to elude the arm of the law by escaping into the neighbouring countries.

SANParks appreciates the return of the army to patrol this border and it is hoped that with their interven-

tion at least one of the escape routes for these wildlife criminals will be made near impossible to breach.

Dr Mabunda said having recently visited Tanzania, he was saddened to hear that a population of over one thousand Eastern African *Diceros michaeli* sub species of rhino has been reduced to ten rhinos since 1960. "Rhinos are under siege from marauding poachers all over the world. Asia and India are suffering the same trend of these species being driven to near extinction through poaching."



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The course, rated 71, offers one a 18-hole challenge via 9-other tees positioned at various angles and distances from the green.

In addition to the well treed bushveld landscape, 400 more indigenous trees have been planted on and around the

well drained lush fairways, along with new water features strategically placed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> holes. The golf course is an integral part of the overall well maintained resort landscape, allowing different habitats for many bird species.

Other facilities on the resort include 3 swimming pools, 5 flood-lit tennis courts, putt-putt, and a driving range on the adjoining property.

Bird watching and scenic walks can be enjoyed along the banks of the tranquil Sabie River, or a bicycle ride around the lodge's extensive estate. Relax in the hippo hide which provides a splendid vantage point for hippo viewing and appreciate the drama of a golden African sunset. Enjoy the resort's clubhouse which has a restaurant and full conference facilities. Kruger Park Lodge is managed by the prestigious Legacy Hotels & Resorts group.



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