

## Medicinal Plants Need New Treatment

**Rhino poachers  
arrested, convicted**

Vegetation around the  
world is on the move

**Rhino poaching update**

There is no respite in the onslaught on South Africa's rhinos. Several arrests have been made and, notably, a Vietnamese citizen has been convicted and sentenced to 10 years in jail.

While these successes are encouraging, authorities are facing a highly organised and sophisticated enemy, with tentacles reaching across several borders. The challenge is in getting to the head of the snake.

South African National Parks (SANParks) confirmed on Wednesday, 28 July that the total figure for rhinos poached in the country since January this year, is 152. This figure encompasses the latest number of rhino poached in provincial parks and private reserves as well.

The Kruger National Park (KNP) alone has lost one black rhino and 65 white rhinos to poachers since January. The Provincial Parks suffered a loss of three black rhinos and 42 white rhinos while private game owners lost one black rhino and 40 white rhinos.

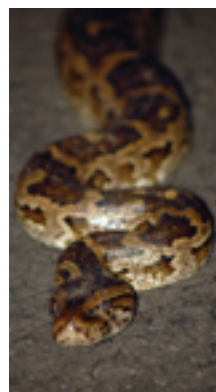
SANParks confirmed that they also add rhino calves that are found dead as a result of their mothers being poached, to the total figure as it has a high probability of death when left alone. This is considered poaching at a secondary level.

The estimated population of white rhinos for the country as a whole at 2009 was 19 409, while the black rhino population figures were at 1 678.

“Perhaps it is no longer appropriate to refer to this spate of illegal killing of rhinos as poaching given the levels of sophistication, violence, precision and the money behind it. We are dealing with unprecedented high levels of organised crime which the Police and all security agencies are helping to defeat,” said Dr David Mabunda, chief executive of SANParks. “We have worked hard as a country, to bring this species back from the brink of extinction and we will continue to defend it even if we become the last man standing,” added Dr Mabunda.

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The Kruger Park e-Times is published regularly to keep you updated on conservation, science, sustainable development and tourism issues in and around South Africa's national parks, transfrontier parks and other environmental hotspots across the globe.

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## **Vietnamese citizen jailed for possession of rhino horn**

A Vietnamese citizen, Xuan Hoang, has been sentenced to 10 years in jail, with no option of a fine. Magistrate Prince Manyathi convicted Hoang on seven counts of illegal possession of rhino horn in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 10 of 2004 as well as for fraud in terms of the Criminal Procedures Act 51 of 1977.

The police arrested him at O.R. Tambo International Airport on the 29th of March 2010, whilst in possession of 16 kilograms of rhino horn, representing four poached rhino and worth approximately R900 000.00. The South African Revenue Service officers assisting the Organised Crime Unit (HAWKS) as well as the Environmental Management Inspectors (EMIs) of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) during the investigation of the case, believe that the street value was probably closer to R2 million.

Magistrate Manyathi said that he wanted to send a strong message to Vietnam with this sentence, as fines did not seem to be a deterrent to them.

He also stressed the fact that Xuan Hoang had travelled to South Africa specifically to commit a crime with self-enrichment as motivation without taking the effect of the damage into consideration.

This ten year penalty for possession of rhino horn sets a new precedent in the war against rhino poachers. In a previous case in the Bloemfontein Regional Court in 2009 a Vietnamese Citizen was convicted for the illegal possession of four rhino horns, but the penalty handed down was a R50 000.00 fine or 12 months imprisonment and a further two years suspended for five years.

These penalties are not a hindrance to poachers against the value of the horn on the black market and often the accused will be back to commit the same crimes.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT)

applauded the conviction. According to the EWT statement Vietnamese nationals have been involved in legal hunts of White Rhino as a means of acquiring rhino horn legally, when, in 2003, the first hunt took place and the horns were legally exported to Vietnam. Since then they have hunted several hundred white rhino with the assistance of a number of unscrupulous South African hunting outfitters and professional hunters.

A number of illegal hunts were also detected and during July 2006 a South African hunting outfitter and his wife were arrested for their part in the illegal hunting of four white rhino in the Limpopo province.

A taxidermist from Mosselbay, who organized the hunt on behalf of a kingpin in the Vietnamese smuggling syndicate, was also arrested in December 2003 and charged together with the hunting outfitter and his wife for illegal hunting and fraud. While under arrest and formally charged for illegal activities with rhino hunting and smuggling in Limpopo, the same outfitter was found guilty of illegal possession of two rhino horns in the Free State during 2007.

He was sentenced to R20, 000 or two years and the R180, 000 cash found in his vehicle at the time of arrest as well as the two rhino horns were forfeited to the State.

He was again apprehended for illegal possession and conveyance of four rhino horns in the Western Cape during 2009 where he entered into a plea agreement and was sentenced to a R50, 000 fine. This is a prime example of the ineffectiveness of inadequate sentences as a deterrent against serious environmental crime.

On national level, South Africa's minister of environmental and water affairs, Buyelwa Sonjica, established a National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit, which is an amalgamation of members of the Environmental Management Inspectorate (EMIs), the HAWKS, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Rhino Security Project.

They are mandated by the Minister of Environmental Affairs to focus on eradicating wildlife crimes and more specifically the rhino poaching syndicates.

The task facing the newly established National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit is a daunting one. Organised Environmental Crimes present many complications such as the use of silenced weapons, dart guns and lately helicopters for their poaching of rhino, but also in the past for removing cycads from their natural state.

The EWT's Rhino Security Project is assisting private landowners to combat the threats from organised crime syndicates by establishing a functional communications

early warning network, and establishing links with Aviation Clubs to assist with finding the helicopter pilots participating

## **Five poaching suspects arrested in Kruger**

The South African National Parks (SANParks) Environmental Crime Investigation (ECI) team and rangers arrested four suspected poachers in the Kruger National Park (KNP) on Saturday, 10 July 2010.

The suspects were found in possession of two freshly chopped rhino horns, an AK 47 assault and a Mosin Nagant bolt action rifles (both with ammunition) and an axe.

In the course of the operation, rangers found a newly killed rhino carcass with horns already chopped off. The four suspected poachers were found immediately after near the Manyeleti Dam and arrested on the spot.

The four suspects, who are all of Mozambican origin, admitted to having camped in the park overnight. It is suspected that they may be linked to other poaching incidents in the park.

Dr David Mabunda, Chief Executive Officer of SANParks, made a further request to members of the public to continue assisting authorities by reporting any suspicious behaviour.

"It is unfortunate that we could not save this young rhino female in time but are convinced that with the added pressure we are putting in protecting our resources the poachers are feeling the pressure and we will prevail", said Dr Mabunda.

Another suspect was arrested on Monday, July 12.

The suspect was found after the rangers heard a suspicious shot being fired in the park and traced the origin.

The suspect had a hunting rifle in his possession. At the time of reporting no dead animal had been found in the vicinity.

Sending a strong warning, Dr David Mabunda, Chief Executive Officer of SANParks said "poachers and their rich bosses sitting in air-conditioned luxury homes in the leafy suburbs of our metropolitan cities must know we are after them". "We will hunt them in the bushes, in the cities, airports and internationally".

SANParks and the South African conservation fraternity continues to request the support and cooperation of all members of society in identifying and reporting suspicious behaviour that could lead to the apprehension and conviction of these criminals.

## Newsclips

### Buffalo kills hiker in Mountain Zebra National Park

Four hikers were attacked by a buffalo bull on a hiking trail in Mountain Zebra National Park (MZNPN) earlier this month (July 2010). All four hikers were injured in the attack and one of the party, Johan Schmidt died at the scene of the accident.

The buffalo attacked the group at about 11:15 shortly after they started walking on the Imbila Hiking Trail.

The other three hikers, Marie Schmidt, wife of the deceased, and Sam and Marianne Sieberhagen, were transported to Cradock Hospital after receiving attention from park staff and paramedics at the scene.

Park rangers followed the spoor of the lone buffalo bull from the scene of the accident but were unable to locate the animal.

Rangers suspect the buffalo's unusually aggressive behaviour may indicate that it is sick or injured.

Hiking trails had been closed until further notice. South African National Parks (SANParks) will conduct an investigation into the incident and following this, determine whether hiking trails in the Park will be reopened.

### Black rhino moved to Tanzania

South African National Parks (SANParks) facilitated the translocation of five black rhino, *Diceros Bicornis Michaeli*, Tanzania's Grumeti in the Serengeti National Park.

This was the first batch of 32 that will eventually end up in Tanzania.

The five animals were transported by air on a Lockheed Hercules C130 from Thaba Tholo, a private nature reserve in Limpopo, South Africa.

About 20 years ago, eight of these eastern *Diceros Bicornis Michaeli* species, which is not indigenous in South Africa, were imported to the country and kept at the Addo Elephant National Park, and then sold to Thaba Tholo.

Mark Anderson, executive director, BirdLife South Africa, Peter Sullivan, chairman, BirdLife South Africa and Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado at Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve.

Below: Dr Precious Moloji-Motsepe, patron, BirdLife South Africa, and Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado at the gala dinner in Johannesburg.



## Princess Takamado explores South Africa's bird life

Japan's princess Takamado recently visited several important bird sites in South Africa. The princess has been the honorary president of BirdLife International since 2004.

Her first stop was at the Marievale Bird Sanctuary and Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve. She was accompanied by Mark Anderson, executive director and Peter Sullivan, chairman of BirdLife South Africa.

Marievale, an international Ramsar site and an Important Bird Area, is threatened by polluted mine water which is being discharged into the Blesbokspruit from the Aurora Mine.

In his presentation during the visit, Stan Madden, who has since 1948 been actively involved in the monitoring of waterbirds at Marievale and has campaigned for its conservation, highlighted the severe threats to Marievale which have resulted in this wetland being listed on the Montreaux Record (a list of Ramsar sites which have undergone a serious deterioration in ecological character).

At Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve, also an Important Bird Area, princess Takamado joined Dr Craig Whittington-Jones and his team who were conducting an African Grass-owl survey.