

ON the TRAIL

The defaunation bulletin
n°46. Events from the 1st of May to the 30th of June 2025



Quarterly information and analysis report on endangered
animals poaching and smuggling
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RHINOCEROSES



Black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*). Photo Octávio Mateus (CC BY-NC)

The white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* and black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* ranging in Africa are listed in Appendix I, except for the white rhinoceros populations of Eswatini and South Africa which are listed in Appendix II for trade of live animals and hunting trophies.

The 3 Asian rhinoceros species are in Appendix I: the Indian rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the Sumatran rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, and the Javan rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*.

AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA

May 8 and 12, 2025

Kruger National Park, Houtboschrand Section, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



- Arrest of 2 Mozambican nationals, ages 29 and 38. They had entered Kruger Park with a hunting rifle and 11 rounds of ammunition. After discovering their tracks, the rangers deployed all available means: a helicopter and a canine brigade. A third man nevertheless managed to escape.

- Four days later, the Houtboschrand section was once again in turmoil following the discovery of fresh tracks left by 2 people. The canine brigade and helicopter returned. The 2 intruders were in possession of an axe, a rifle, and 6 cartridges. One of them was shot during the arrest, while the other managed to escape. The wounded man, an illegal immigrant from Mozambique, is under police guard at the hospital.¹

End of May, 2025

Pongola, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. Border with Eswatini.

After a few months of silence, poachers have returned in force around Pongola. Five rhinos, including one calf, were poached in just a few days. The economic value of the 4 adults is estimated at 3.6 million rand (200,000 US\$).

On November 20, 2024, 3 poachers were arrested by police in Pongola. They had not yet had time to take action.

Rhinoceros poaching in Pongola, see "On the Trail" n°2 p.45, n°8 p.60 (ref.13), n°10 p.47 (ref.26), n°13 p.71 (ref.26), n°16 p.67 (ref.17), n°17 p.80 (ref.57), n°23 p.102 (ref.16) and p.103 (ref.25).²

May 31, 2025

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



Sentencing of Collen Mofokeng to one year in prison for trespassing in Kruger Park (1), to 4 years for possession of a firearm with the intent to commit a crime (2), 6 years for possession of a firearm with an obliterated serial number (3), 5 years for possession of a firearm (4), 2 years for possession of ammunition (5), one year for possession of a dangerous weapon (axe or knife) (6), 4 years for conspiracy to commit an offence (7). Sentences 1 and 7 are combined. Sentences 2, 4, 5, and 6 are combined with sentence 3. Instead of 23 years in prison, Collen Mofokeng will serve 10. He had broken into the Stolzneck section with Sizwe Mduduzi Mathebula and Surprise Mashele on June 30, 2016. They were arrested and later released on bail. Mofokeng was recaptured by the police in 2022. The judgement prohibits him from owning a firearm for life.³

June 3, 2025

Lindleyspoort, North West Province, South Africa

In the early hours of the morning, a Mozambican national was arrested by Rustenburg police in possession of an unregistered 375-calibre hunting rifle, 5 bullets, and 3 knives. His car, a white Nissan, had been spotted 2 weeks earlier after a rhino was poached between Lindleyspoort and Boshhoek, and his return to the area was immediately reported to the police by the ranch operators. Two accomplices managed to escape into the bush during the roadside check.⁴

June 5, 2025

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



Philip Mfana Masuku was sentenced to 3 years in prison for trespassing in a national park, 10 years in prison for killing 2 rhinos in the Pretoriuskop section of Kruger Park, 4 years for conspiracy to commit a crime, and one year for possession of 2 dangerous weapons (2 knives). The first, 2nd, and 4th sentences are combined. The effective sentence is 14 years. The case dates back to February 17, 2019. Two of Masuku's accomplices fled. Masuku was released on bail and failed to respond to court summonses. He was arrested again in 2023.⁵

June 5, 2025

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



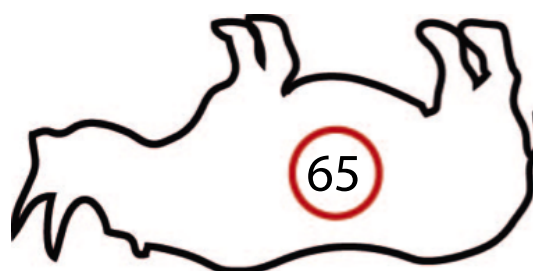
The 2 rangers Mkanzi and Sihlangu, sentenced in September 2024 to 20 years in prison for poaching 2 rhinos in the Crocodile Bridge section at the end of 2023 (see "On the Trail" n°23 p.106, ref.43), are facing new penalties, this time financial. The Skukuza court ordered them to pay the National Prosecuting Authority's Asset Forfeiture Unit of the Treasury Department the sum of 836,600 rand (46,700 US\$) with interest at 11% (calculated from the date of the poaching), totaling 51,800 US\$.⁶

Mid-June 2025

Dundee, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa



Two rhinos on a ranch were victims of poaching. One was killed and dehorned by the attackers, while the other managed to escape after the attack. He was found dying, with his horns still intact. Veterinarians were forced to euthanise him. Across the country, according to official figures, 65 rhinos have been killed by poachers since the beginning of the year.⁷



June 17, 2025

Kruger National Park, Houtboschrand Section, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

In the centre of Kruger Park, the patrol spotted footprints and, following the tracks, came across 2 individuals believed to be Mozambican nationals, one of whom was carrying a rifle. When ordered to put down his rifle, he fled and was recaptured. He is charged with trespassing in the park, possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition, contravention of the Immigration Act. His accomplice disappeared into thin air.⁸

June 19, 2025

Pongola, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa



Poachers took advantage of the full moon to attack a rhino on a ranch. The full moon is called "poacher's moon." During "poacher's moon," flashlights are unnecessary. There is less risk of being spotted, and escape is quicker.⁹

June 23, 2025

Kempton Park, Gauteng Province, South Africa



Abraham Makhubela and Besana Mahamba were arrested on January 28, 2019, at Johannesburg International Airport with 10 rhino horns or sections of rhino horns worth an estimated 1.24 million rand, or 86,340 US\$, minutes before their flight to Asia (see "On the Trail" n°23 p.107, ref.45). Mahamba has been acquitted. Makhubela has been sentenced to 8 years in prison, 3 of which are suspended, with a 5-year probation period.¹⁰

NAMIBIA

May 13, 2025

Maltahöhe, Hardap Region, Namibia

54,000 US\$ to whoever leads to the arrest of the poachers and horn thieves of 4 rhinos, 3 females and one male. The carnage in the heart of the country spared a little female orphan.¹¹



ZIMBABWE

May 14, 2025

Imire Rhino & Wildlife Conservancy, Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe



Death of Gomo. The 22-year-old black rhinoceros was the "darling" of the Imire Rhino & Wildlife Conservancy. In 2007, 18 years ago, Imire had already lost 3 black rhinos, including a pregnant female. Poachers had taken the horns. His poaching and the amputation of his horn were a grim introduction to the Southern African Development Community's international conference on Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCA), held in Harare from May 19 to 23, 2025. TFCAs are ecological zones straddling the borders of 2 or more countries. In Zimbabwe and southern Africa, they were established by the Southern African Development Community's Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement (1999) to improve conservation efforts in ecosystems shared by several countries. There are over 220 TFCAs worldwide, including 13 in the Southern African Development Community region.¹²

ASIA

CHINA

End of May 2025

Yangshan Port, Zhejiang Province, China



Seizure in a shipping container declared to be transporting ore tailings of 40 kg of rhinoceros horn broken into 126 pieces.¹³

VIET NAM

May 15, 2025

Hanoi Municipality, Viet Nam

Sentencing of Cao Xuan Manh to 7 years in prison and his accomplices Nguyen Van Ba and Nguyen Van Cung to 5 and 4 years in prison respectively. They had been arrested by the Hanoi Economic Police on January 12, 2024 while attempting to sell 4.1 kg of rhinoceros horn fragments. Manh was previously known for his major involvement in tiger and tiger cub trafficking in Nghe An province.¹⁴



EUROPE

POLAND

Night of Thursday, May 29, to Friday, May 30, 2025

Pszczyna, Silesian Voivodeship, Poland

Theft of 2 rhinoceros horns from the hunting pavilion of the Pszczyna Castle Museum. Their value is estimated at 75,000 € (85,300 US\$).¹⁵