

# Rhino poachers sentenced

Over 360 suspected rhino poachers have, in the past six, months been handed ranging sentences as authorities continue to combat the scourge. The arrests were a culmination of investigations by the National Joint Operational and Intelligence Structure's Operation Rhino 9 Task Team responsible for prevention, combatting and investigating the crime.



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An additional 15 suspects, aged between 33 and 50 years, were arrested last week during intelligence-driven operations in Mpumalanga. Four unlicensed firearms and ammunition were seized during the arrests, national police spokesperson Vishnu Naidoo said in a statement.

“Between January and June 2018, the Rhino 9 Task Team secured various convictions, the maximum nine years’ imprisonment and the least being three months’ imprisonment with the option of paying a R1500 fine,” Naidoo said.

## 165 in custody

Of the 365 suspects arrested, he said 165 remain in custody while court processes unfolded. During this period, six were deported to their countries of origin while 11 received fines and 57 are serving their various jail terms.

“These convictions are evidence of the commitment of law enforcement agencies and game reserve parks to preserve endangered species for future generations,” Naidoo said.

“The arrested suspects have since appeared in various courts on charges of unlawful possession of firearm/s, unlawful possession of ammunition, possession of dangerous weapon/s, trespassing, hunting of protected animal, kidnapping, assault, possession of the remains of a wild animal, possession of suspected stolen property and being in the country illegally or without proper documentation.”

An assortment of incriminating evidence, which included cell-phones and axes, was seized during the arrests.

## Rhino 9 Task Team

The Rhino 9 Task Team is a multidisciplinary team operating in Mpumalanga and comprises various government departments such as the police, customs and excise, the South African National Defence Force, as well as Ezemvelo and SANParks game rangers.

“The strategies that we have put in place in the fight against rhino poaching are significantly reducing the chances of smugglers operating at our ports of entry in our national parks. These arrests should serve as a warning and deterrent to other potential poachers,” Naidoo said.

“Community support and assistance is welcomed in the fight against this scourge. Poachers and smugglers are warned that over and above facing criminal prosecution, their ill-gotten gains will also be confiscated in terms of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121/1998 (POCA).”

Police have urged the people of South Africa to continue supporting the police in its efforts to bring down the scourge of crime. Anyone with information related to rhino poaching may contact the nearest police station or SAPS Crime Stop number: 0860010111.

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