

Continued action needed to address rhino poaching

Following the release of the 2014 statistics for rhino poaching in South Africa, WWF South Africa has expressed the need for continued strategic action along the entire illicit horn trafficking network to address the crisis.



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The figures released by the South African Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) show that 1,215 rhinos were illegally killed in 2014, an increase of 21% on the 1,004 animals lost in 2013.

The Kruger National Park, which holds the majority of the country's rhinos, remains the epicentre of illegal activity with 827 rhinos lost throughout the year, representing nearly two-thirds of all animals killed. South Africa is home to approximately 20,000 rhinos - more than 80% of the world's rhinos.

South Africa can boast of a number of recent law enforcement successes with the DEA announcing 386 rhino crime-related arrests in 2014. However, continued targeted efforts are required.

Complex crisis

"There is no single solution to this complex global crisis," acknowledged Dr Jo Shaw, Rhino Programme manager for WWF SA. "In 2015, we need to keep working together on the strategic interventions which will have the greatest impact and result in greatest benefits for our rhinos."

WWF South Africa's Rhino Programme is built around a strategic five-point framework for supporting rhino conservation, namely:

- To grow rhino numbers through good protection and monitoring, including the translocation of animals to boost population growth rates.

- To work with communities living close to key rhino populations to enable them to access benefits of conservation as well as develop alternative livelihoods.
- To support relevant agencies in analysing international criminal syndicates involved in wildlife trafficking and provide tools for law enforcement.
- To strengthen cross-border ties through international agreements and collaboration.
- To reduce the new demand for rhino horn in countries like Vietnam through innovative behaviour change messaging such as the 'Chi' campaign launched in 2014.

"Rhino poaching is now recognised on the international stage as a symptom of growing involvement of sophisticated transnational criminal syndicates in the trafficking of wildlife products. We recognise that this battle impacts our national security and economy and will need everyone to work together to combat these threats if we are to achieve a tangible reduction in rhino losses," Dr Morné du Plessis, CEO of WWF SA said.

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