

S.Africa using surveillance aircraft against poaching

December 4 2012



A four-month-old black baby rhino stands beside a hay bale at the Entabeni Safari Conservancy in Limpopo, 300 kms northeast of Johannesburg, on July 31. Faced with a dizzying spike in the rate of rhino killings, South Africa announced on Tuesday it was deploying a reconnaissance aircraft to combat poaching.

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Officials at the internationally-famed [Kruger National Park](#) said the military aircraft is equipped with highly sophisticated [surveillance technology](#)—including thermal imaging—would be deployed to detect [poachers](#) looking for rhino horn.

The aircraft was donated to South African National Parks (SANParks) by the Ichikowitz Family Foundation, whose chairman also runs a defence company.

"You have to fight fire with fire," said Ivor Ichikowitz, chairman of the foundation and also chair of Paramount Group, Africa's largest privately held defence and aerospace company.

"This [thermal imaging](#) technology will deliver more enhanced and powerful observation capability to the Kruger National Park's rangers, making it difficult for poachers to hide."

A record 588 rhino have been killed so far this year in South Africa, home to the world's largest rhino population—more than 18,000 white rhino and around 1,600 critically endangered black rhino.

Of these 364 have been slaughtered in the Kruger National Park, a vast reserve that borders Mozambique.

Ichikowitz said poaching gangs have become sophisticated and well resourced.

"The war has been declared... enough is enough, we cannot afford to lose any single rhino," said Kruger spokesman William Mabasa.

The [rhinos](#) have become victims of a booming demand for their horns, which are believed to have medicinal properties in some traditional Asian medicine.

The animals' distinctive horns are hacked off to be smuggled to the Asian black market where the fingernail-like substance is falsely believed to have powerful healing properties.

The horn is touted as a potent aphrodisiac and even a cure for cancer and turn up on the black market in Vietnam, China and other east Asian nations where they are literally worth their weight in gold.

A Thai national was this year jailed for 40 years for running bogus rhino hunts as cover to sell horns on the [black market](#).

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