

Poachers threatening African rhino species, experts say

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A rhinoceros resting in the Kruger National Park near Nelspruit, South Africa, on February 6, 2013. Rhino poaching soared by nearly half last year and appears to be increasing this year, conservationists said Tuesday, warning that the small population of animals would soon begin to shrink.

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Poaching of the animals jumped by 43 percent between 2011 and 2012 and so far this year one rhino had been killed by poachers every 11 hours, the International Union for [Conservation of Nature](#) (IUCN) said.

Last year at least 745 rhinos were poached across Africa, with 668 of the animals killed in South Africa alone, it said in a statement.

And since 2006 nearly 2,400 rhinos have been killed across Africa, slowing the [population growth](#) to its lowest levels since 1995, it said.

"Well-organised and well-funded [crime syndicates](#) are continuing to feed the growing black market with rhino horn," said Mike Knight, who heads the IUCN's African Rhino Specialist Group.

"Over the past few years, consumers' use of rhino horn has shifted from traditional Asian medicine practices to new uses, such as to convey status," he explained, pointing out that demand in Vietnam was especially escalating.

There are currently 5,055 Black Rhinoceros and 20,405 White Rhinoceros in Africa, according to the organisation.

While the populations are continuing to grow slightly, they will begin declining in less than two years if the poaching continues to increase, IUCN said.

The organisation called on the international community, and especially the main rhino horn markets Vietnam and China, as well as transit hub Mozambique, "to urgently address the crisis by strengthening and enforcing regional and international trade laws, particularly in relation to rhino horn."

The plight of [rhinos](#) and [African elephants](#), which are increasingly being

poached for their ivory, will be among the top issues discussed at a summit on endangered species in Bangkok next month, organised by UN [wildlife trade](#) regulator CITES.

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