

Statistics highlight need for action against rhino poaching

January 20 2014



Credit: Martin Harvey / WWF-Canon

The South African government today revealed that a record 1004 rhinos were killed by poachers during 2013 across the country, the equivalent of nearly three animals a day. World famous safari destination Kruger National Park continues to be the hardest hit with 606 rhino deaths.

"These criminal networks are threatening our national security and damaging our economy by frightening away tourists," said Dr Jo Shaw,

Rhino Programme Manager for WWF-South Africa. "Rhino poaching and rhino horn trafficking are not simply environmental issues, they represent threats to the very fabric of our society."

The annual poaching figure is a sharp increase from the 668 [rhinos](#) lost in 2012, and brings South Africa's rhino populations closer to a critical tipping point when deaths will begin to outnumber births driving the animals into a dangerous decline. The country is home to about 80 per cent of Africa's rhinos, 37 of which have already been killed in the first weeks of 2014.

Rhino horns are smuggled by organized international criminal syndicates to Asia, principally Viet Nam, where they are primarily used as a status symbol and purported health tonic.

In late December 2012, South Africa signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Viet Nam on tackling wildlife trafficking and the two nations later developed a joint rhino action plan. South Africa has since signed a similar agreement with China, and is developing others with Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Hong Kong.

"The bottom line is South Africa's rhinos are up against the wall, facing a genuine crisis and agreements like these have to translate into meaningful action on the ground," Shaw said.

Later this month Viet Nam must report on its progress in making seizures, arrests, prosecutions and convictions related to rhino horn trafficking. The country has also been instructed to develop and implement measures to reduce consumer demand for rhino horn.

Similarly, Mozambique, a top transit point for horn exiting Africa, must show the enactment and implementation of legislation with deterrent penalties to combat wildlife crime and stop the killing of rhinos and

trafficking of their horns.

There are also a number of steps South Africa needs to take to make a tangible difference, said Shaw.

"It would be encouraging to see more significant arrests higher up the trade chain, and to see current arrests resulting in convictions with strong sentences which will effectively deter this criminal activity. More significant action to root out corruption would also be welcome," she said.

Next month world leaders will meet in London for a conference on wildlife crime convened by UK Prime Minister David Cameron, and attended by Princes Charles and William. Heads of state and foreign ministers from around 50 countries are expected to attend. The conference aims to produce a declaration of political commitment to ensure a coordinated global response to illegal wildlife trade through improving law enforcement and the role of the criminal justice system; reducing demand for illegal wildlife products; and supporting the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods.

Provided by WWF

Citation: Statistics highlight need for action against rhino poaching (2014, January 20) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-statistics-highlight-action-rhino-poaching.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.