

Kenya rhino-poaching doubled last year

February 27 2014



A Kenya Wildlife Services vet approaches a wild male black rhino named Sambu after it was tranquilized in Lewa conservancy on August 28, 2013

Armed poachers slaughtered double the number of Kenyan rhinos in 2013 compared to the year before amid a surge in wildlife killings, government officials said Thursday.

At least 59 [rhinos](#) were killed for their horns last year, compared to 30 in 2012, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) spokesman Paul Mbugua said.

The rise in poaching—with rhinos even being killed inside the heavily guarded Kenyan capital's national park—show that poachers have little fear of tough new laws designed to stem the wave of of killings.

There was more positive news for elephants, with killings down by around a fifth, from 384 killed in 2012 to 302 last year.

But Mbugua told AFP that "poachers have become more aggressive".

"They will stop at nothing to get their target," he said. "If you stand between them and the elephants or rhinos, they will kill you."

Around 1,030 rhinos are now left in Kenya, and some 38,000 elephants.

Poaching has risen sharply in Africa in recent years, with rhinos and elephants particularly hard-hit. An INTERPOL report this week saying there had been record levels of global [ivory](#) seizures worldwide in 2013.

Asian consumers who buy smuggled rhino horn—which is made of keratin, the same material as human fingernails—believe that it has powerful healing properties.

Ivory is sought for jewellery and decorative objects.

INTERPOL said that criminal gangs are "making millions at the cost of our wildlife with comparatively little risk."

It noted that the seizure of "large-scale ivory shipments—each one representing the slaughter of hundreds of [elephants](#)—point to the involvement of organised crime networks operating across multiple countries."

Last month a Kenyan court handed out a record sentence to a Chinese

ivory smuggler, the first person to be convicted under a new law, after he was arrested carrying an ivory tusk weighing 3.4 kilogrammes (7.5 pounds).

He was ordered to pay 20 million shillings (170,500 euros, \$233,000) or else go to jail for seven years.

Kenya is also a key transit point for ivory smuggled from across the region.

Africa's elephant population is estimated at 500,000 animals, compared with 1.2 million in 1980 and 10 million in 1900, and they are listed as vulnerable.

Safari tours are a key draw for tourism to Kenya, which accounts for 12.5 percent of the country's revenue and 11 percent of jobs.

© 2014 AFP

Citation: Kenya rhino-poaching doubled last year (2014, February 27) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-kenya-rhino-poaching-year.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.