

South Africa rhino poaching toll jumps

July 10 2014



A rhinoceros in the Kruger National Park on February 6, 2013

Some 558 rhino have been killed in South Africa already this year, setting the country on course for a gruesome new record number of poaching deaths, wildlife officials said Thursday.

Despite stepped-up efforts to curb the scourge, the number of animals killed is around 100 higher than at the same point in 2013, a year which saw a record 1,004 deaths.

The vast, tourist-filled Kruger National Park has been hardest hit.

"Since January 2014, 351 rhinos have been poached in the park," the department of environmental affairs said.

South Africa is home to around 80 percent of the world's rhino population, estimated at more than 25,000 but alarming [poaching](#) figures are threatening the endangered species.

Poachers have become increasingly sophisticated, shooting the animals with semi-automatic rifles or poisoned darts before hacking off their horns.

The horns are prized as a status symbol in Asia, where they are falsely believed to possess medicinal properties to cure cancers and hangovers, even though they are composed of the same material as fingernails.

Recent efforts to halt the scourge include the arrest of South African park and other officials believed to be implicated in poaching rings.

After years of talks, South Africa and Mozambique in April signed an agreement to fight poaching.

Mozambique, which borders Kruger park is said to be a recruitment centre for illegal hunters hired by syndicates.

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