

S.Africa rhino poaching drops by a quarter

September 21 2018



South Africa's iconic Kruger park has long borne the brunt of rhino poaching

The number of rhino killed for their horns by poachers in South Africa dipped by 26 percent in the first eight months of the year, officials said on Friday.

The Department of Environmental Affairs said that 508 rhino were

poached since the start of the year until August, down from 691 over the same period last year.

"This decline comes despite a dramatic escalation in poacher activity" inside the Kruger National Park, said the department in a statement.

South Africa's iconic Kruger has long borne the brunt of rhino poaching, fuelled by demand for their horns in Asia where they are believed to have medicinal properties.

The country lost 1,028 rhino to poaching in 2017.

Police said on Friday they had found 20 rhino horns and arrested two suspects in a sting operation at a house in the eastern Mpumalanga province which borders Mozambique.

Earlier this week officers also arrested six "key" members of a rhino trafficking gang which allegedly ran its operations with the help of corrupt police and private game farm operators.

"This is a significant and important breakthrough," said Albi Modise, spokesman for the Department of Environmental Affairs.

Nearly 200 suspects have been arrested for rhino poaching this year.

In the last eight years alone, roughly a quarter of the world population of rhinos has been killed in South Africa, home to 80 percent of the remaining animals.

Rhino horn is composed mainly of keratin, the same substance as in human nails and it is normally sold in powdered form.

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