

Beat: Travel

Record 455 rhinos poached in South Africa so far this year

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USPA News - Poachers have slaughtered at least 455 rhinos in South Africa so far this year, already surpassing the record annual tally for last year as demand for its horn continues at an all-time high, according to data released by the South African government on Tuesday. According to the new figures, at least 455 rhinos were illegally killed across the country between January 1 and Monday, surpassing the record 448 rhinos killed throughout 2011.

Most of the rhinos killed so far this year were living in Kruger National Park (KNP) and KwaZulu-Natal province with 272 and 55 rhinos poached respectively. "The Kruger National Park has lost 272 rhinos to poaching. KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and the North West provinces continue to be the hardest hit by poachers, collectively accounting for the loss of 150 rhinos," a statement from the country's ministry of environmental affairs said. Efforts to curb the criminal syndicates responsible for the killings have intensified in recent years, with 207 arrests so far this year, including 179 poachers, 10 receivers and 18 couriers. Police arrested 232 poachers last year, a significant increase from the 165 arrests made in 2010. Rhinos are mostly being killed for their horns which are popular in medicine markets across Southeast Asia, and an increasing demand has pushed prices to more than \$50,000 per kilogram (2.2 pounds). At least 448 rhinos were poached in South Africa in 2011, a substantial increase from the 333 rhinos killed in 2010, according to SANParks. At least 122 rhinos were killed in 2009. In November 2011, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared Africa's Western Black Rhinoceros to be extinct. The rhino subspecies was once widespread in central-west Africa, but the Western Black Rhinoceros became heavily hunted in the beginning of the 20th century. Although preservation actions in the 1930s allowed the species to partially recover, protection efforts later declined. By 2000, only about a dozen Western Black Rhinoceros were thought to be alive, and a survey in 2006 found none to be alive. No sightings of the animal have been reported since, and none were held in captivity. And in October 2011, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Rhino Foundation confirmed that Javan rhinoceros have been driven to extinction in Vietnam. With the complete extinction in Vietnam, only one small group remains in the wild: the 40 to 50 Javan rhinos in Ujung Kulon in Indonesia. Other rhino subspecies also face extinction. The population of the Sumatran rhino, which is found from northeastern India through Southeast Asia in Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Malaysia and the Indonesian Islands of Borneo and Sumatra, has declined by at least 50 percent during the last 15 years, making it one of the most endangered rhino species in the world.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

