

Beat: Politics

Record 1,000 rhinos poached in South Africa last year, govt says

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USPA News - Poachers slaughtered a record 1,000 rhinos in South Africa last year, a sharp increase from the record set the previous year, according to data released by the South African government on Friday. Nearly 40 rhinos have already been killed so far this year.

According to the new figures, at least 1,004 rhinos were illegally killed across the country last year, surpassing the previous record of 668 rhinos killed in 2012. Most of the rhinos killed last year were living in Kruger National Park (KNP) which borders Mozambique, an impoverished nation believed to be an operational base for organized poachers. "During 2013, the Kruger National Park continued to bear the brunt of rhino poaching, losing a total of 606 of the iconic animals to poachers," South Africa's ministry of environmental affairs said. It added that 114 rhinos were poached in Limpopo, 92 in Mpumalanga, 87 in North West and 85 in KwaZulu-Natal. Efforts to curb the criminal syndicates responsible for the killings have intensified in recent years, with 343 arrests last year, a significant increase from the 267 arrests made in 2012. But the efforts to stop the rhino slaughter appears to have had little effect, with 37 rhinos reported killed in only the first 16 days of the new year. 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 \$65,000 per kilogram (2.2 pounds), making it more expensive than gold, platinum and cocaine. At least 2,612 rhinos have been killed in South Africa alone since 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. And in October 2011, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Rhino Foundation confirmed that Javan rhinoceros were driven to extinction in Vietnam. With the complete extinction in Vietnam, only one small group remains in the wild: the estimated 40 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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