Beat: Miscellaneous

Number of rhinos poached in S. Africa this year jumps to 588

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USPA News - Poachers in South Africa have slaughtered at least 100 rhinos in less than a month, representing a dramatic increase and pushing the number of rhinos killed for their horns so far this year from 488 last month to 588 currently. According to the latest figures, at least 588 rhinos were illegally killed across the country between January 1 and Tuesday, well above the record 448 rhinos killed throughout 2011.

Most of the rhinos killed so far this year were living in Kruger National Park (KNP) and the North West province with 362 and 75 rhinos poached respectively. "The Kruger National Park has lost 362 rhinos to poaching. The North West, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces continue to be the hardest hit by poachers, collectively accounting for the loss of 186 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 246 arrests so far this year, including 217 poaches, 18 couriers and 11 receivers. Police arrested 232 poachers last year, a significant increase from the 165 arrests made in 2010. Earlier this week, South African National Parks (SANParks) announced it has hired 30 new Armed Field Rangers. "They will be a support to conservation staff and perform duties that will enable SANParks field rangers to attend to critical functions such as law enforcement," said Antionet van Wyk of SANParks. "The passing-out of these 30 Armed Field Rangers will step up the crime fighting ability against poachers and give invaluable support to the men and women working on the ground." 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 Conservative 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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