

Rhino poaching at new record levels

South Africa said Sunday, 10 May, that more rhinos were poached in the first four months of 2015 than in the same period last year as the scourge continues to hit record levels.



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"By the end of April 2015 the number of rhino we lost to poachers was 393 for the whole country," Environment Minister Edna Molewa told a press conference in Pretoria, adding that 290 of them were poached in the Kruger National Park.

The figure is a more than 18 percent increase over the first four months of 2014, when 331 rhinos were poached including 212 in Kruger, she said.

The vast park bordering Mozambique is home to the majority of South Africa's 20,700 rhinos, which are killed for their horns, used in traditional Asian medicine.

Despite the appointment of an ex-army general to oversee anti-poaching operations, a new record is set each year in the number of rhinos killed as cash-strapped South Africans and Mozambicans join the lucrative trade.

A total of 1,215 rhinos were killed in 2014, compared with 1,004 in 2013, 668 in 2012 and 448 in 2011.

The numbers began surging in 2008, which saw 83 rhinos killed compared with just 13 the previous year.

Sunday's public briefing on rhino poaching was the first the South African government has given in months.

"This is not deliberate, it is because of the heavy load of work that we have," Molewa said.

"We are soldiering on, we do think that this fight will have to be won and we will win it," she added.

Since 2008, South African authorities have struggled to contain the carnage despite moving some animals out of poaching hotspots in Kruger.

South African police commissioner Riah Phiyega reported that, as of the end of April, park rangers detained 132 suspected poachers, crediting the use of helicopters and anti-poaching dogs for an uptick in arrests.

In South Africa, many people buy beaded "Rhino Force" bracelets and affix life-sized red plastic rhino horns to the bonnets of their cars in support the anti-rhino poaching cause.

The government in February announced it would investigate whether the trade in rhino horn should be legalised and regulated to try to halt the poaching.

Source: AFP

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