

PRESS/MEDIA RELEASE

BREAKING: RHINO HORN BUST ON N2 – POACHING SYNDICATE UNDER INVESTIGATION

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An undercover operation spearheaded by the Hawks' Bellville Economic Protected Resources (EPR) unit, together with SAPS Overberg K9 and Swellendam Stock Theft & Endangered Species teams, ended with three men from Gqeberha in cuffs and three rhino horns valued at R258,270 recovered.

The operation was carried out in a quiet stretch of the N2 near Buffeljagsrivier—an ideal drop-off point for illicit wildlife sales.

According to Hawks spokesperson Lt Col Siyabulela Vukubi, one suspect was arrested on the spot; the other two tried to flee but were immediately pursued and apprehended.

Although poaching has dropped since 2023; 2024 marked a 15% decline in poaching – from 499 to 420 rhino deaths.

Yet, early 2025's figures show that the poaching rate is holding steady, – mirroring the 2024 average.

The pressure remains concentrated in national parks, accounting for over 60% of poaching so far this year.

Rhino horn traffickers still exploit the demand from Traditional Chinese Medicine, status symbolism, aphrodisiac myths, and even speculative investment in valuable horn stockpiles.

This bust exposes just a sliver of a vast, cross-provincial criminal network.

DNA testing is likely underway to trace the horns to their origin—possibly linking to poaching hotspots in the Eastern Cape or Limpopo.

As CapeNature CEO, Dr Ashley Naidoo, said, "Tackling wildlife crime isn't just about seizures—it's about dismantling the global syndicates behind them".

Questions:

- Where did these horns originate?
- Who financed this transaction—local go-betweens or international buyers?
- Will this bust open the lid on a larger trafficking network?

Stay tuned. This investigation has only just begun.

**Leticia Cox is an investigative journalist and conservation storyteller. Known as LensTraveller, she documents the intersection of wildlife, crime, and community resilience across Southern Africa. Her stories and photojournalism projects highlight the voices often left out of the conservation conversation.*