

Rhino poaching on the wane

Rhino poaching in Africa has declined from 2015 through to late 2022, according to a soon-to-be-released report. And this includes South Africa, which has borne the brunt of poaching over the past 17 years.

The total number of rhinos poached in South Africa fell from 1175 reported deaths in 2015 to 438 in 2022, says the report by the African Rhino Specialist Group of the International Union Conservation of Nature. In most other African states poaching fell last year. The exception was Namibia, where the number of rhinos poached increased from 47 in 2021 to 93 in 2022.

Table 1: Rhinos killed by poachers in African range states from 2006 to 2022.

Range State	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
South Africa	36	13	83	122	333	448	668	1004	1215	1175	1054	1028	769	594	394	451	438
Namibia	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	4	30	97	66	57	84	62	43	47	93
Zimbabwe	21	38	164	39	52	42	31	38	20	50	35	36	34	82	12	4	11
Botswana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	7	32	62	33	6
Kenya	3	1	6	21	22	27	29	59	35	11	10	9	4	4	0	6	1
Malawi	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	* 1
Zambia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
Mozambique	0	9	5	15	16	10	16	15	19	13	5	5	8	6	2	0	na
Tanzania	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	5	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	na
DR Congo	0	0	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0	0	0	na
Eswatini	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	na
Uganda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	na
Total	60	62	262	201	426	532	751	1123	1324	1349	1167	1125	930	773	503	501	551

Na = Not available at time of report.

* This death in Malawi resulted from a snaring, not necessarily targeted rhino poaching.

Total number of rhinos poached in African range states over the past 17 years

South Africa	9,825	84%
Zimbabwe	709	6%
Namibia	589	5%
Kenya	248	2%
Mozambique	144	1,2%
Botswana	142	1,2%
Tanzania	19	0,16%
Malawi	7	0,06%
DR Congo	6	0,05%
Zambia	4	0,03%
Eswatini	3	0,03%

Total	11696
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The AfSRG report found that within South Africa poaching has increasingly shifted away from the Kruger National Park (124 poached rhinos detected during 2022) to Kwazulu-Natal (228 poached rhino on state reserves; 16 poached rhinos on private properties). A further 70 poached rhinos were reported elsewhere in South Africa.

African rhino populations looking up

The AfSRG has also reported an increase in African rhinos from 22,137 at the end of 2021 to 23,171 at the end of 2022. This comprised 6,468 black (increasing at 3.9% from 2021 to 2022) and 16,801 white rhinos (increasing at 5.6%). It is the first time since 2012 that white rhinos increased at a continental scale.

((Note: 6,468 + 16,801 totals 23,269 (not 23,171). Have sent query on this to our AfSRG's, Dr Mike Knight.))

In an earlier report presented at CoP17 last year, the AfSRG noted that 96% of Africa's rhino populations were found in four range states in Africa. At the end of 2021, South Africa was home to 15,024 rhinos (68% of the continent's population), followed by Namibia with 3,390 rhinos (15%), Kenya 1,811 (8%), and Zimbabwe 1033 rhinos (5%).

Fig 1: Total rhino populations in Africa at the end of 2021

African Rhinoceros populations	2021	%
South Africa	15 024	68%
Namibia	3 390	15%
Kenya	1 811	8%
Zimbabwe	1 033	5%
Sub-Total	21 258	96%
Botswana	265	1,2%
Tanzania	212	1,0%
Eswatini (formerly Swaziland)	146	0,7%
Zambia	66	0,3%
Rwanda	58	0,3%
Malawi	56	0,3%
Sub-total	803	3,6%
Uganda	35	0,16%
Democratic Republic of Congo	20	0,09%
Mozambique	16	0,07%
Angola	3	0,01%
Chad	2	0,01%
Sub-total	76	0,4%
Total African rhino populations at end of 2021	22 137	

Botswana, Tanzania, Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), Zambia, Rwanda and Malawi were collectively home to 803 rhinos (3,6 % of the continent's rhinos) at the end of 2021. The number of wild rhinos in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Angola and Chad totalled 76, less

than 0.4 % of the continent's population. While these rhino populations are tiny, there has been a significant increase in rhinos in each of these countries since 2005, with Botswana's populations increasing by 98%, from 5 to 265 since 2005.

Black rhinos fare better than their white cousins

The AfSRG figures show the black rhino populations have almost doubled from 2005 to 2021 (3,726 in 2005 to 6,195 in 2021) compared to a 9% increase in white rhinos from 14,448 to 15,942 for the same period.

In South Africa, total African rhinoceros populations remained relatively stable, but there was a decrease in white rhinos, down by 544 from 13,512 in 2005 to 12,968 in 2021, compared to black rhino populations, which increased by 677 from 1,379 to 2,056 over the same period.

Range states	Total rhinoceros			White rhinos			Black rhinos	
	2005	2021		2005	2021		2005	2021
South Africa	14 900	15 024		13 521	12 968		1 379	2 056
Namibia	1 434	3 390		293	1 234		1 141	2 156
Kenya	774	1 811		234	873		540	938
Zimbabwe	835	1 033		308	417		527	616
Botswana	5	265			242		5	23
Tanzania	101	212					101	212
Eswatini	91	146		75	98		16	48
Zambia	8	66		2	8		6	58
Rwanda	1	58			30		1	28
Malawi	10	56					10	56
Uganda	4	35		4	35			
DRC	4	20		4	20			
Mozambique	7	16		7	14			2
Angola	-	3			3			
Senegal *	0	* 3			* 3			* 3
Chad	Na	2						2
Cote d'Ivoire *	Na	*2			*1			* 1
Africa total	18 174	22 137		14 448	15 942		3 726	6 195

- The AfSRG report was co-authored by Dr Mike Knight, chair of the IUCN's African Rhino Specialist Group, Keit Mosweu (Programme Officer) and Sam Ferreira (Scientific Officer).