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# 668 rhino poached in 2012

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Johannesburg - Poachers slaughtered a record 668 rhino in 2012 as demand for their horns continued to surge on the black market in Asia, the government said on Thursday.

Over 60% of the slaughtered pachyderms were from the Kruger National Park.

Five more animals have been killed since the start of this year, according to the environmental affairs ministry.

Poaching-related arrests climbed from 165 in 2010 to 267 in 2012.

South Africa is home to about three-quarters of Africa's 20 000 or so white rhino and 4 800 critically endangered black rhino.

Authorities have launched inter-linking campaigns to slow the killings.

Soldiers and surveillance aircraft were deployed in the Kruger Park, while stricter criteria for rhino hunting permits saw applications tumble to 90 in 2012, down from 222 a year before.

Rhino are victims of a booming demand for their horns, which some people in Asia think have medicinal properties. The medical claim is widely discredited.

South Africa and Vietnam last year signed a deal to tackle the trade.

The number of rhino poached in the country has risen sharply from 13 in 2007 to 448 in 2011.

- AFP

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