

'Animal activist' arrested for illegal possession of rhino horns

Derek Lewitton, owner of Black Rock Rhino Conservation, has been arrested by the Hawks following a tip-off that led to the discovery of 26 rhino carcasses on his private reserve, located near Gravelotte, west of Phalaborwa, Limpopo.



Image source: Lee Ann Nicholls from [Pexels](#)

The arrest took place last Friday night, 22 December, at Lewitton's Harmony farm, following a 16-hour investigation that uncovered 10 undocumented rhino horns, as well as illegal firearms.

The charges laid against the 53-year-old American national include breaking the Firearms Act and the National Biodiversity Act of 2004 and the Nemba Act involving restricted activities with specimens of rhino horns.

The law requires that a rhino's death must be reported to the South African Police and Department of Nature Conservation, who will then remove the horn.

Limpopo Police Spokesman Brigadier Hulani Mashaba [told the press](#) that "some 26 unreported rhino carcasses were found on the property along with 10 rhino horns in the farmhouse safe.



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6 Jun 2022



"Seven unlawfully acquired firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition were also confiscated in a raid with the Hawks and armed officers and tactical response officers."

"From the helicopter the place looked like a slaughterhouse and everywhere you looked rhinos were lying there dead," commented Major-General Jan Scheepers.

"We found 26 carcasses but I can tell you there is bound to be many more. Some had been shot dead and some died of natural causes and we are still investigating how they died."

Lewitton has cut a controversial figure in the conservation world as an advocate for the legal trade of rhino horns. He believes that poaching would be diminished if horns could be trimmed from live rhino and legally sold.

Lewitton was formally charged at the Namakgale Magistrate's Court on Wednesday, 27 December. He will remain in custody until 3 January 2024, at which time he can make a formal bail application.

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