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A R100 000 reward is being offered for information that could lead to arrests of poachers after five rhinos were poached on the Inverdoorn Private Game Reserve near Ceres, roughly an hour and half's drive from Cape Town.

The gruesome discovery was made at 10.30 on Wednesday night during regular patrols by the reserve's anti-poaching unit. They found two rhinos had succumbed to injuries. Two other rhinos were found still alive, but died later.

Following immediate action, the unit's tracking team found a fifth rhino seriously injured. She had a gunshot wound to her face. It was also discovered that one of the slain animals had been pregnant.

Management and conservation

teams were immediately informed and tried to salvage the situation as poachers were suspected to still be on the property, said Johan van Schalkwyk, spokesperson for Aquila Collection, which manages Inverdoorn.

A team of wildlife veterinarians under the leadership of Johan Marais was dispatched to attend to the fifth rhino, he said.

"There is lots of blood, it is a horrific scene and it looks like a slaughter scene – all their horns have been cut. It is also tragic to note that one of the rhinos whose horns were cut was actually a synthetic horn which was part of a project to dehorn rhinos. One of the slaughtered rhinos had a realistic and lifelike fibreglass horn with zero value to these poachers," Van Schalkwyk said.

Inverdoorn had previously said while it did not promote dehorning

of rhinos, this measure was taken to reduce the risk of poaching. It however has not deterred poachers from attacking the game reserve.

"There is one rhino who is still alive but also in a terrible condition. The vets were on the site and looking at facial reconstructive surgery as a matter of priority. They need to first remove any of the bullet fragments that are still stuck, and to try to calm her down, which is an active ongoing situation," Van Schalkwyk said.

The game reserve's owner, Searl Derman, said he was horrified to relive "this nightmare" as there had been a poaching incident at Aquila Private Game Reserve in 2011. Derman said no effort would be spared to catch the perpetrators.

"We can assure you we have already instituted a private forensic investigative team and private investigators on

a local, regional and national level and we will vigorously pursue these poachers," he said.

Police spokesperson André Traut said no arrests had been made and police were searching for the poachers.

Staff at the game reserve were traumatised, general manager Storm de Lange said, and expressed her heartfelt condolences.

A manhunt for the suspects had been initiated and a reward was offered in order to motivate informants to provide information, she said.

Derman said: "We are starting by offering a R100 000 reward for confidential information that will lead to the successful arrest of the criminals that brought much heartache and loss to the staff and management of this unique Western Cape private game reserve.

"Due to the ongoing pandemic

and international travel bans, private game reserves all over South Africa are more exposed than they would like to be. We thank our hard-working rangers and anti-poaching unit for their relentless work. We are proud of their response to the crime and their ongoing commitment to wildlife conservation during these dire times within the tourism sector," she said.

The public has been invited to donate towards the private investigation, forensic teams, medical and vet bills.

The public and any other supporting services can make contact via [info@savingprivaterhino.org](mailto:info@savingprivaterhino.org), +27(0)83 441 2826, or send information via the Saving Private Rhino Facebook page message facility. Anyone with information can also contact the police anonymously at 08600 10111 or via the MySAPSApp.