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CONSERVATION

Rhino, Elephant Poaching Continues to Decline in Africa

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Rhino and elephant poaching continues to decline in Africa, most likely due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and enhanced protection efforts. This is particularly the case in Namibia, as well as Zimbabwe and Tanzania, bringing hope to a species plagued by intensive poaching over the past few decades.

Namibia

According to the country's [Ministry of Environment and Tourism](#), this year has so far seen nine rhinos illegally killed, an eight-year low, and four elephants, a five-year low.

Rhino poaching peaked in the country in 2015 with 97 killings, while elephant poaching peaked in 2016 with 101 killings. Thankfully, poaching has seen a downward trend since then, allowing black rhino's numbers to recover in the country. The government has attributed this to greater enforcement, as well as larger fines and longer prison sentences for poachers.

Namibia is home to a third of all remaining black rhinos, including 200 free-roaming black rhinos. Namibia has the only free-roaming black rhinos left in the world.

Tanzania

Once known as the world's elephant killing fields, Tanzania has been taking firm action on animal poaching, making more than 2,300 arrests of poachers and traffickers over the past five years. By the beginning of 2020, at least 11 organised wildlife trafficking syndicates were identified and 21 "kingpins" were arrested.

[Elephant populations in Tanzania have risen](#) from 43,000 in 2014 to 60,000 in 2019. More recent figures from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism state that the number of elephants in the Serengeti Ecosystem has risen from 6,087 in 2014 to 7,061 in 2020.

Arrest reports suggest that alongside Tanzanians, both Chinese and West African criminal networks are at play in the country, but that the ‘leading players’ are Asian criminal networks, which purchase illegal products locally and export them to Asia.

Zimbabwe

While planned rhino census operations have been postponed, the black rhino population in Africa has seen a small increase to 5,630 from 5,500 in 2019. Zimbabwe’s Bubye Valley saw a 13.8% population growth during the first half of 2020.

Despite this good news, there is still much work to be done. For rhinos, poaching remains the largest threat to their survival. A decline in the price for rhino horn, trending downward since 2015, has unfortunately not disincentivised poachers. It is vital that punishments continue to be enforced and that they are severe enough to disincentivise would-be poachers.

You might also like: [In Numbers: Illegal Elephant Poaching in Africa](#)

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