

Rhino poaching: 'Khama is lying, malicious, grossly irresponsible'

THALEFANG CHARLES Tuesday, March 02, 2021



Former president Khama with former wildlife minister Tshekedi Khama during relocation of rhinos. The Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) director Kabelo Senyatso has strongly refuted claims by former president Ian Khama that 120 rhinos have been poached in the last 18 months.

Yesterday Khama, through his Facebook account, shared images of carcasses of two dead rhinos being eaten by vultures showing hacked off faces, which is a sign of poaching. In the post, Khama said: "This is what failure looks like. No lockdown or curfew for poachers. In 18 months about 120 rhinos with and without horns have been slaughtered. After corona, there will be none left for tourists to come and see" [sic].

This morning Senyatso released a press statement saying it is nothing but 'lies and economic sabotage' by the former president. Khama fell out with his successor and has quit the ruling party to form a new political party opposed to the current administration.

“The DWNP is disappointed at the tone of the post, which is regrettable coming from a former very high ranking government official who should otherwise be aware of the security sensitivities of the subject matter, and its negative implications on tourism, which is the second-highest foreign revenue earner for the country. The motive for the post is unclear, but borders on economic sabotage,” Senyatso said in the statement.

He added: “DWNP advises that the claims in the above-cited post are devoid of any truth, and are misleading, malicious and grossly irresponsible”.

Senyatso argues, without providing details if the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown and curfew have had any direct and positive impact on the anti-poaching operations of DWNP and its collaborators.

Last

year during the lockdown, Botswana quietly dehorned an undisclosed number of rhinos in the Okavango Delta and relocated some to a more secure Orapa Game Park to protect them against the relentless poaching.

Meanwhile this morning, Khama shared a Facebook post from Bhejane Trust claiming that 12 rhinos were poached last week in the Okavango Delta with a comment saying, “We have the ability and the means to tackle poaching without outside help. What is lacking is the will and the leadership”. . Bhejane Trust is a relatively unknown conservation organisation based in Zimbabwe.

In their Facebook post using the same images shared by Khama, they said: “More bad news on the rhino situation in Botswana. There have been 12 rhinos poached in the last two weeks in the Okavango Delta area, including a family – male, female and calf – in one hit. Urgent action is required by the Botswana authorities, and they should bring in expert advice and assistance immediately if any rhino is to survive”.

The size of the rhino population in Botswana is a closely guarded secret for the protection of the animals. Botswana was seen as the last sanctuary for the rhinos and Khama led an ambitious relocation of rhinos from South Africa with a promise that Botswana will do whatever it takes to protect them. But crime syndicates keep gaining access despite protection measures.

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