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# Botswana Allays Concerns Over Rhino Poaching Crisis

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Botswana wildlife authorities say poaching is under control, despite reports the country's rhinoceros population is on the verge of extinction.

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GABORONE —

Botswana wildlife authorities have refuted reports the country's rhinoceros population is on the verge of extinction due to poaching. The southern African country has battled a rise in poaching, with more than 60 animals killed in the last two years.

Department of Wildlife and National Parks Director Kabelo Senyatso said both rhinoceros and elephant poaching remain under control.

In a statement addressing poaching concerns, Senyatso said the government is committed to protecting the key species.

He added that, while isolated reports of poaching both the rhino and elephant continue to be reported, the government's anti-poaching efforts are making progress.



FILE - An elephant sits in the water in one of the dry channels of the wildlife reach Okavango Delta near the Nxaraga village in the outskirts of Maun, Botswana, Sept. 28, 2019.

But conservationist Neil Fitt said poaching incidents could have dropped due to the decrease in the number of rhinoceroses in the Okavango Delta.

"Rhino poaching could have subsided only because there is lot less numbers there," Fitt said. "Elephant poaching is still happening, but we are getting very little reports because the government is not saying what is happening."

In a bid to stem the poaching tide, government security forces have killed more than 20 poachers in the last two years as part of a zero-tolerance campaign that Botswana has enforced since 2013.

Fitt said a multi-stakeholder approach to fighting poaching is key.

"The best that we can do is we all work together - the government, the private sector and NGOs. Sometimes you need to put your hand up and say we have got a problem, we need to solve it, and we need everyone to help, and we are open to all ideas, not just ideas that we like," he said.

Map Ives, former director at Rhino Conservation Botswana, said there is a need for an intelligence-based approach to counter poaching.

"That intelligence comes in several layers," Ives said. "You need local intelligence within the Okavango Delta. You need local plus intelligence, which is surrounding the Okavango Delta, and then you need regional intelligence that is from countries surrounding Botswana, including Namibia, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe. And then you need international intelligence. This sort of intelligence requires a high level of trust, not only government but between the private sector and NGOs."

According to a 2021 International Rhino Foundation status report released last month, the rhino population faces a significant poaching threat in Botswana.

But, the report notes, the government is taking steps to address the issue, including dehorning the rhinos to make them less attractive to poachers and relocating the animals to safer places.