



ZIMBABWE

Rhino Poaching Way Down in Botswana

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GABORONE, BOTSWANA — Botswana said it's seen a dramatic drop in rhinoceros poaching this year after taking greater steps to protect its shrinking rhino population.

The significant decline was revealed in a report presented this week at a conference on CITES – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

After losing 126 animals between 2018 and 2021, only six rhinoceroses have been poached in Botswana in 2022.

The report says poaching incidents peaked in 2020 when the country lost 62 rhinos. The following year, at least 33 were reported killed by poachers.

Botswana's director of wildlife and national parks, Kabelo Senyatso, said the country is taking many steps to protect the rhinos.

“We have got a national anti-poaching structure which brings together all law enforcement agencies,” Senyatso said. “They (rhinos) are very safe. Botswana works with its neighbors, we have got a lot of coordinating mechanisms that brings us into contact with our neighbors.”

The report attributes the decline to the deployment of the army to poaching hotspots, dehorning the rhinos and moving the animals away from vulnerable areas.

The document says the swampy nature of the Okavango Delta, where most of the poaching took place, makes it difficult for law enforcement officers to patrol.

Map Ives, founder of Rhino Conservation Botswana, said there has been a shift in rhino poaching activities from Botswana to nearby countries like Namibia and South Africa.

“As the report points out, these criminal poaching syndicates operate on an international scale,” Ives said. “They are highly financed, highly organized and probably have tentacles within official structures, which enables their work. So they will move between different countries on a risk and reward basis.”

He said it is possible that the poachers no longer view Botswana as an ideal poaching ground due to a sharp decline in rhino numbers.

“I think the main reason that poaching of rhinos has gone down in Botswana is that these poaching syndicates literally have cleaned it out,” Ives said. “There are just a very few rhinos left in the wild. The rest have been killed or moved by our government to other places within Botswana. It is not worth their while to come after a few rhinos when they may get caught.”

The International Rhino Foundation’s 2022 State of the Rhino report indicates Africa’s black rhino population grew by 12%.

However, Botswana’s black rhino herd is under pressure and now numbers only 23 animals, down from nearly 60 in 2018.

The country’s white rhinoceros population stands at 285.

The State of the Rhino document says, overall, Africa's white rhinoceros' population is declining due to poaching.