

Elephant poaching probe at Khorixas

News - Namibia | 2013-08-01

by Adam Hartman



THE Protective Resources Unit (PRU) of the Erongo Police are investigating two incidents of alleged elephant poaching near Khorixas after two carcasses were discovered in the area – one of which the tusks have been removed.

THE Protective Resources Unit (PRU) of the Erongo Police are investigating two incidents of alleged elephant poaching near Khorixas after two carcasses were discovered in the area – one of which the tusks have been removed.

The Namibian understands that one of the dead animals was found nearby a homestead in the Khorixas area. The owner was apparently questioned by wildlife wardens whether he knew about the carcass to which he concurred, apparently stating that he had shot the elephant in self-defence,

Another carcass was discovered a few kilometers away from the first – this time with its tusks removed, raising the suspicion that the elephants were poached.

According to sources in the region who work with elephants, the suspect is apparently known to the police and has been involved in previous incidences of poaching. Whether the two carcasses are linked to the same motive and by the same person remains a matter of further inquiry.

The latest incident has sparked concern though that poachers may have found a 'weak link' in Namibia's conservation area since Damaraland is vast and anyone could come from anywhere and poach the animals without being noticed.

There are currently three main groups of elephants totalling more than 600 in the Ugab, Khorixas and Huab areas respectively.

Elephant and human conflict is quite common in Damaraland, especially during drought when the animals are in search of water and would try and get to it on communal farms and homesteads. There have been several incidences where elephant herds would destroy water points and even dwellings in order to access water.

A group called Elephant Human Relations Aid (EHRA) has for the past decade attempted to find long-term sustainable solutions to the ever-growing problem of facilitating the peaceful co-habitation between the subsistence farmers, community members and the desert adapted elephants.

In the 1980's the population of desert adapted elephants in the Southern Kunene Region of Damaraland were wiped out entirely through years of poaching and hunting. For years elephants were absent from the area. This was until 1998 when 'Voortrekker', a bull, led 'Mama Africa's' herd back to the Ugab River. From that point other herds followed and today there are a total of seven elephant herds present in the area.

The 20 years the elephants were absent resulted in a generational gap of knowledge transfer in regard to co-existing with elephants by the people that live there. EHRA, with their knowledge of this animal and its behaviour, teach the people of

the land on how to handle the elephants and how to manage their water infrastructure in order to minimise conflict.

Although poaching in the region during the past decade or so has been limited, there have been fatal conflicts between humans and elephants where humans would chase away or kill the animals to save their property.

Whether the latest incident was due to general conflict or poaching is unknown although the concern was strong enough to call in the police to investigate.

Head of the PRU, inspector Jatikua Tjiramba, said that the matter is being investigated and that no arrests have been made yet.