

Rhino poachers strike again

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by Staff Reporter



POACHERS ruthlessly gunned down a black rhino last week Tuesday in Namibia's northwest region.

The rhino carcass was discovered in the Palmwag concession, renowned as home to the largest free roaming population of black rhinos globally.

It was reported that the sub-adult male was died after at least five bullets struck his body.

Due to the location of the bullets, on both sides of its body, it is suspected that more than one person might have been involved in the shooting.

By the time the carcass was discovered, the horns had been removed and carried away by the poachers.

To date, no arrests have been made.

The killing comes hard on the heels of another poaching incident close to Windhoek, in which poachers killed two hand-reared white rhinos. No arrests have been made in that case yet.

Moreover, three Chinese nationals were arrested at the Hosea Kutako International Airport in late March, following the discovery of 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin in their suitcases.

Also, in February, law enforcement agents successfully executed a sting operation, which led to the arrest of a Chinese businessman in Opuwo, following his attempts to buy rhino horns from locals in the area.

While official numbers are sketchy, it is estimated that around 10 rhinos have been poached in Namibia since 2009, including the three cases this year.

On Wednesday last week, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), released a press statement in which they "noted with great concern" the "poaching of rhinos and the illegal possession of 14 rhino horns in the country". The statement, issued by acting permanent secretary Teofilus Nghitila, addressed concerns that the MET was being secretive about the surge in poaching and smuggling of rhino horns.

"It is important to note that the Government of Namibia is not and will never be secretive about the cases of illegal killing of wildlife and illicit trade in wildlife products, as this can be counter-productive in our efforts to curb illicit trade ..." part of the the statement read.

The MET explained, however, that cases still under investigation and yet to appear before the courts would be handled sensitively. As a result, information will be scarce during that time.

The statement did not announce the previous day's discovery of a poached rhino, which had been reported to the MET.

Moreover, the MET press statement assured the public that the government was aware that "the current illegal wildlife related activities clearly need to be brought under control" and as such, a number of anti-poaching measures were being strengthened and implemented.

These include continuing efforts to strengthen effective crime prevention and law enforcement through the coordination and integration of clusters of activities such as planning, monitoring and adaptive management, a strong and effective presence on the ground, dedicated investigation units that focus on criminal syndicates and organised crime, collaboration with police, army, judiciary, intelligence service, communities, farmers amongst other steps, such as training and retraining of all MET staff members.