

Rhino poaching up – reports

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by Staff Reporter



AT LEAST 10 rhinos were killed by poachers in Namibia in the last five years.

According to information provided by the Namibian government to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and several media reports, the 10 are significantly lower than rhinos poached in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa.

Although official government confirmation of these numbers has not been obtained, a confidential source working in rhino conservation in Namibia, said the numbers given to IUCN show that five rhinos were poached between 2009 and February 2013.

Several attempts to get comment from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism have not yielded any result this week, though the ministry said it was preparing an official statement on the rhino poaching issue in Namibia and should have released it yesterday.

The IUCN document, titled 'African Rhinoceroses – Latest trends in rhino numbers and poaching' – was submitted last year in Bangkok, Thailand to the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP 16) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

A graph contained in the document shows that zero rhinos were poached in Namibia from 2006 to 2008.

In 2009 and 2010 two rhinos were poached each year, making a total of four for those two years.

In 2011, the graph shows zero poaching incidents and one incident in 2012. The 2012 incident included the killing of a female black rhino for her horn. However, as a result of her death, her young calf died a few days later, making the total fatalities for 2012 two.

While the document only has data for poaching incidents up to February 20 in 2013, newspaper reports tell the rest of the story.

In June 2013, a Namibian daily reported the killing of a female rhino caught in an illegally set wire snare on a private farm.

At the time, it was reported that poachers had hacked off her horn with pangas. It is unclear if the theft of her horn was an opportunistic gamble by the poachers, who had placed snares all over the farm and caught other types of wildlife in this way.

In October 2013, it was reported that the carcasses of two rhinos, one a pregnant female, were found on a farm in the Okavango district. Both were treated as poached animals.

Altogether, including the two deaths of white rhinos in March this year, and excluding the peripheral death of the rhino calf from 2012, the number of rhinos poached comes to 10.

There is no official information which indicates how many poachers were arrested and prosecuted, and what the nationalities of the poachers were, during the past eight years.

Although no official confirmation was given in response to number of poaching incidents, a well-placed source this week said that the numbers of rhino poaching and mortalities in Namibia remain unconfirmed, but could be higher than officially recorded. "I believe the numbers are higher. There are some mortalities due to the drought and some that were left unsure because the investigations are ongoing". The source said that the total numbers of black and white rhino in Namibia "are low" and that the small number existing in the country "is not at anything close to safe numbers".

The IUCN document, which is being cited by rhino experts worldwide, showed that Namibia's black rhino population is three times higher than the white rhino population, although the black rhino remains a critically endangered animal.

The document notes that the average numbers of rhinos poached per day across Africa in 2012 increased from 1,7 per day in the first nine months of that year to 3,07 in the last quarter of 2012.

The document states that poaching numbers in Namibia at that time remained "very low and the country has been developing a security strategy to increase protection of its elephants and rhinos".

Following the recent arrests of Chinese nationals in Namibia, the police confirmed that rhino horn is valued at N\$41 000 per kilogramme on the international market.