

Black rhino slaughter uncovered

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THREE carcasses of black rhinos were discovered in the Uukwaluudhi conservancy situated between Oshakati and Kamanjab last week on Thursday.

Police spokesperson Sergeant Slogan Matheus yesterday confirmed the discovery, saying veterinarians had to also put down one rhino because of bullet wounds deemed too serious.

Matheus said “unknown suspects who used an unknown type of firearm” killed two rhinos and hacked off their horns.

He said only two of the rhinos could have been killed by poachers. The third one, he said, could have died of “natural causes” because “everything was still intact”.

Matheus was not able to provide any more details as to how old the carcasses or the wounds on the surviving rhinos were. He, however, said the investigation was ongoing.

Sources said there were three other rhinos with less serious bullet wounds on the conservancy, while one seemed unharmed. These have been translocated to a secret location.

Uukwaluudhi conservancy rhinos form part of government's widely hailed rhino custodianship programme under which the black rhinos remain the property of government, while the landowners derive non-consumptive benefits.

In return, rhinos would repopulate across Namibia and their value as attractive tourist drawcards would ensure that their safety is top priority.

Jaco Muller, chairperson of the newly-launched private rhino conservation group, Help our Rhino Now Namibia (HoRN.Nam), said he was called to investigate the rhino population on the Uukwaluudhi conservancy last week after it was reported that the rhinos had not been seen for some time.

Muller discovered the carcasses when he flew over the conservancy in a gyrocopter and the police as well as officials from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) were informed.

Sources close to the investigation estimated that two carcasses might have been between six and seven months. They also said the wounds on the other four rhinos, including the one that was put down, might be recent. This gives rise to suspicions of a rhino syndicate targeting the small, clustered rhino population for a number of months now.

The killing of the two black rhinos in Uukwaluudhi brings the total number of poaching incidents of rhino in Namibia in 2014 to eight, excluding the bull that was put down last week as a result of serious injuries from a shooting.

Environment ministry public relations officer Romeo Muyanda yesterday could only “confirm that an incident took place”

“It is very unfortunate that the issue is continuing. We will let the investigations continue,” he said.

MET Director of Parks and Wildlife Management Colgar Sikopo was not available for comment.