

## Shock spike in Etosha rhino deaths

News - National | 2015-04-20  
by Staff Reporter

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**THE threat looming over Namibia's rhinoceros population is even bigger than previously thought, with 38 rhino carcasses having been discovered in the Etosha National Park so far this year.**

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism announced in a media statement on Friday that another 31 rhino carcasses have been found in the Etosha National Park since 8 April.

The ministry, together with the police, is investigating the death of the animals to, among other things, determine whether all of the 31 rhinos had been poached, or if some had died of natural causes, the ministry's permanent secretary, Simeon Negumbo, said in the statement.

While announcing that more incidents of rhino poaching had been discovered in Etosha, which is Namibia's flagship wildlife conservation area, Negumbo also stated that some of the newly discovered carcasses were old and some still had their horns attached.

Most of the 31 carcasses were discovered in the western part of Etosha, Negumbo stated.

Friday's press release by the ministry was issued a week after a previous media statement, in which the ministry announced that seven rhino carcasses – of which six were the remains of male animals – had been discovered in Etosha from February to 7 April. The ministry said the discovery of the seven carcasses brought the number of rhinos found poached in Etosha since October last year to a total of 11.

The 31 additional animals that have been found dead could bring the rhino poaching death toll in Etosha to 42 within a period of six months.

According to the ministry, five carcasses of rhinos that had been killed by poachers have also been discovered in the Kunene region between February and 7 April.

Namibia lost 24 rhinos to poaching during 2014, according to official figures.

With the poaching of rhinos on the increase in Namibia, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and law enforcement authorities have had little success in tracking down and arresting suspected poachers so far.

Only one person – a resident of Kunene – has been convicted of rhino poaching in Namibia last year.

He was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in August last year, after he was found guilty of the poaching of a rhino cow in the Sesfontein area in December 2012.

Three Chinese citizens were arrested at Hosea Kutako International Airport in March last year and charged with illegal possession and export of controlled wildlife products, after 14 rhino horns were allegedly discovered in the luggage they were about to take with them on a flight out of Namibia. The three men are still in custody, with their trial scheduled to start in the Windhoek Regional Court in June.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism announced on 7 April that it is offering a reward of N\$30 000 to anyone providing the ministry or the police with information leading to the arrest and successful prosecution of people involved in poaching.

The world's rhino population has been threatened by a poaching onslaught in recent years as a result of a demand for rhino horn in some Asian countries, such as China and Vietnam, where it is superstitiously believed that rhino horn has medicinal properties.

In fact, the animals' horns consist mostly of keratin – the same substance that is the main component of animal hooves and human hair and nails, which means that Asian consumers wanting to buy rhino horn at exorbitant prices would derive the same benefit from biting their own nails as they would from ingesting rhino horn.

According to the United Kingdom-based rhino conservation organisation Save the Rhino International, claims that in some Asian countries it is believed that rhino horn can be used as an aphrodisiac by men experiencing problems with their libido or flaccid erections are not correct, although research has shown that in some countries, like Vietnam, a belief in the supposed libidinal power of rhino horn is rearing its head.

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- One can come to only one conclusion - somebody with authority in government is working together with the poachers - and without doubt just for the bribe money which can run into millions. - Freedom Fighter | 2015-04-20 [14413]
- am wondering why you are saying the poaching is increasing, why are you paid money for bush and you are claiming you are there to guard our animals while you are the hunting and selling them to those people, I cannot understand in a game reserve like etosha where professional are people can hunt and kill animals everyday while there are their NO NO, the first investigation should be for the employees in that park. does it mean those people they use to fly in and out? even their foot prints cannot be seen anywhere, I don't agree , someone must be behind this try your good investigation you will arrest more of your employees, people lets be honesty to ourselves, a thief cannot be stealing in my house everyday like that without making a plan for him, unless these people have connections with poachers. the minister should do something deep down, he will get them very soon. I cannot blame the Chinese if so because someone who is on the market buying goods is he /she wrong ? no no at the other hand, it is only wrong if they are the one sending them to go and poach their .

employees of the ministry they know very well ask them nicely they will say something . - Johani Leo Mavuna | 2015-04-20 [14416]

- Increase awareness (media), stiffen punishments.. - Ndiili Malima | 2015-04-20 [14415]
- Why are you shocked when you fully well know that your friends the Chinese you allow in country with impunity are the ones behind the rhino hunting. Pleas save us ur sorry excuses and enjoy the Chinese money while you for sure your times will end sooner than you think.Tsek! - Hamunyela Konembudu | 2015-04-20 [14414]