



Etosha poaching: Arrests expected soon

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Suspects have been identified in the ongoing Etosha National Park poaching spree and arrests are expected soon. This is according to Tourism and Environment Minister Pohamba Shifeta, who also announced that the reward money for information leading to the arrest of the poachers had been doubled from N\$30 000 to N\$60 000. The minister said there had already been breakthroughs in the north-eastern regions, including Zambezi, where six suspects had been arrested. He said other cases were being followed up and Namibia was working closely with neighbouring countries. According to Shifeta, no new poaching cases have been recorded during the past week since Namibian Sun reported that 54 rhino carcasses had been discovered in Etosha since the beginning of the year. The total number of rhino carcasses discovered in Namibia so far is 60, up by 36



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse>

from last year when only 24 rhino carcasses were found. As for elephants - 78 were poached in 2014 and 23 have been poached so far this year. According to Shifeta, the ministry has been working with other law-enforcement and conservation agencies to put short- and long-term strategic measures in place to stop the poaching and illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products. These measures involve looking at human capacity, surveillance, patrolling and detection. He said members of the police are on the ground in Etosha National Park, Bwabwata National Park and Palmwag Tourism Concession Area. Aerial patrols are being conducted by the police and the Namibia Defence Force. "We are actively conducting joint patrols with the conservancies in curbing wildlife crime, particularly rhino and elephant poaching." He said while field patrols remain an essential element of law-enforcement operations, they need to be complemented by investigations and intelligence-led operations. Therefore, the ministry has an active collaboration with the police in investigating cases of poaching. According to Shifeta, there are two areas in Etosha that are being targeted by poachers - the northern and south-western parts of the park - and the poaching is happening within a range of a few kilometres. "Therefore an extensive assessment will be done of these poaching activities, to see whether there is a pattern, and if the same syndicate is committing the crimes." Shifeta said the number of law-enforcement officials in Etosha had been increased from 40 to 140 and more vehicles had been deployed to the area. Other measures will be implemented in due course. He said the criminals have progressed from using hunting rifles to using automatic rifles. "This is a transnational network of criminals and those shooting the animals in Namibia probably do not even know the network they are working for, but only the handler. It is connected with the poaching going on in Southern Africa." The minister said the myth that is being created around rhino and elephant products is pushing up the price of these products so much that the demand is higher than the supply. He added that the ministry welcomes any private initiative to assist them. WINDHOEK ELLANIE SMIT