

Nam makes big strides in combating poaching – Shifeta

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THE Namibian government has made great strides in combating the poaching of endangered animals in recent months, the minister of environment and tourism (MET), Pohamba Shifeta, has said.

Speaking to *Nampa* on Tuesday, Shifeta commended efforts made by members of the anti-poaching unit, the Namibian Police, ministry officials as well as members of the public to root out poaching.

"I am happy for a job well done. We had a breakthrough with some of the arrests we made so far. We want a zero tolerance for poaching, and we will use all the resources at our disposal to prevent further killings of our endangered species such as elephants and rhinos," he stated.

Earlier this year, Shifeta paid a visit to the country's hot spots for rhino and elephant poaching. Such hot spots include the Kunene region as well as the Etosha National Park.

Rhino poaching figures released by the ministry stands at 80 since the beginning of 2015 to date.

Only one rhino poaching incident was recorded in December 2015, compared to about 20 incidents recorded in December 2014 in the Etosha National Park. This is because the anti-poaching unit together with the relevant officials were active on the ground as well as in the air, Shifeta said.

He said the poaching incident in December 2015 at the park was more sophisticated, as a chainsaw was used to remove the horns.

The carcass was found near a waterhole close to Namutoni rest camp.

Shifeta revealed that it is suspected that a silencer was used to shoot the animal. A silencer is a device attached to the barrel of a firearm or air gun, which reduces the amount of noise and visible muzzle flash generated by firing a shot.

Meanwhile, three rhino carcasses were found at the Grootberg Lodge in Kunene region in late December last year. One of the carcasses was a calf that succumbed when the mother was poached. It is suspected that the rhinos were killed some time ago as the carcasses were old.

The police also made some arrests in connection with this specific criminal activity and investigations continue, said the minister.

Shifeta is optimistic that poaching in Namibia will decrease, or be totally wiped out with the help of the members of the public.

However, a lack of resources is hampering the exercise. This include amongst others, shortages of qualified personnel.

He said MET will also acquire drones to fight poaching in remote areas in the near future.

“Namibia will not tolerate poachers, traffickers and organised criminals which employ and pay locals to kill the country's heritage. We still have the upper hand,” he stated.

– Nampa