

Rhino poaching toll at 80

News - National | 2016-01-07

Page no: (



by Tuyeimo Haidula



FOUR more rhino carcasses were found at Grootberg Lodge in Kunene region in late December last year.

This discovery brought Namibia's rhino poaching toll last year to 80, according to figures released by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

"Three more were killed by late December and the fourth was a baby rhino that succumbed when its mother was poached," environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said when he confirmed the discovery yesterday.

Speaking to The Namibian from Grootberg Lodge, Shifeta said he will be there for three days to assess the situation on the ground and will be moving to Etosha National Park for more field patrols, as these are the hot spots.

He said three people had been arrested in connection with the poaching and the police were continuing to investigate the incident.

Shifeta also said that although it was reported that one suspect was a foreigner, it had turned out they were all Namibians. He said one of the suspects claimed to have been sent by an Angolan national, which he said was not true.

He said on 26 November last year, two arrests were also made and all the suspects are still in custody after they were denied bail.

"In December last year only one poaching incident was recorded compared to more than 20 poached in 2014. That is a reduction in numbers," he said, adding that this serves as encouragement to continue the patrols. The minister said all they want to do is see whether officials are logistically equipped and to talk to law enforcement and encourage them through the operation.

After the patrols they will come to the table to evaluate data collected and come up with new strategies.

"The idea is to ensure that no poaching incident takes place at all, especially of our endangered elephants and rhinos," Shifeta asserted.

He said all three suspects arrested are from outside the system, as no links have been established with insiders.

Most of the animals have been poached in the Etosha National Park. Some of the carcasses found in Etosha last year were old, though, and could have been the remains of animals that were killed before the start of 2015.

Namibia has experienced a sharp increase in cases of rhino poaching over the past five years with only one rhinoceros poached in 2009, one in 2010 and one in 2011. Two were killed in 2012, four in 2013, and 25 in 2014.

The ministry's spokesperson, Romeo Muyunda, yesterday said the reward of N\$60 000 for information that would lead to the arrest and prosecution of rhino poachers remains on offer.

He said the ministry is considering increasing the reward.