

## 162 rhinos, elephants poached since 2015

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**THE environment minister, Pohamba Shifeta, described the latest rhino and elephant poaching figures as “a pity”, saying his ministry will do all it can to keep these figures from rising further.**

According to figures released by the minister yesterday, three more rhino carcasses, possibly poached for their horns, were recently discovered in the Etosha National Park, pushing the figure of known rhino mortalities up to 37 this year, which brings the total rhino deaths since last year to 162.

According to Shifeta, new investigation and monitoring techniques using aerial observations have shown that more animals were killed than previously noted. The latest numbers include rhino mortalities from all over Namibia.

The new techniques have also resulted in more arrests. Since May, about 13 people have been arrested for either being in possession of rhino horns and/or elephant tusks, or for being in possession of live ammunition, and being linked to poaching incidences.

Shifeta, though, lamented the fact that many of those arrested have previously been released on bail, and gone back into repeating their crimes.

He said that he has already spoken to the prosecutor general that bail conditions be stricter, and suggested that those released on bail must report to the police stations in the towns they come from three times a day, and that they would need permission if they wanted to travel further than a five-kilometre radius from their place of residence.

Shifeta said the ministry is trying all it can to keep the poachers at bay. According to him, horseback patrols will also be introduced to investigate and hunt poachers in areas where there is lush vegetation that often allows suspects to escape detection.

It is, however, not just the rhino mortalities which are increasing. Elephant mortalities this year rose to 31 animals, bringing the total since January 2015 to 80.

According to the minister, aerial observations once again revealed suspicious activity in the thickets near the Chobe river in the Zambezi region, which otherwise would not have been detected from the ground. Only after seeing the tracks from the air was a ground investigation launched.

Shifeta explained that not all dead animals were necessarily poached, hence the need for forensic investigations to confirm cases. He also explained that a distinction must be made in poaching an animal for its horns, and finding an animal and removing the horns - the latter not being poaching, but the possession of a protected resource.

Poaching and illegal wildlife trade are devastating populations of wildlife throughout Africa. Syndicates involving hunters, handlers (usually business people operating in Namibia) and international traders have already been exposed and tried in

Namibia. Rhino horn is particularly valuable in Asia because it is believed to hold medicinal properties, while also being regarded as an aphrodisiac.

Elephant tusks are mainly used as valuable material for expensive artefacts. Horns and tusks can fetch high prices on the black market.

Namibia has declared war on poaching, with bodies like the Save the Rhino Trust, MET, conservancies, local communities and Namibia's law enforcement agencies all fighting the scourge.

The vast majority of poaching cases occurred in the Etosha National Park, but the Kunene and Zambezi regions are also targeted.