



## Rhino owners must vet workers

### Poaching on farms mainly an inside job

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With increased anti-poaching efforts taking place in Namibia the trend of rhino poaching has shifted to black rhino under custodianship and privately owned white rhinos.

At the first national workshop on rhino security on custodian land and private white rhino farms, owners were urged to start vetting employees, with evidence indicating that in the majority of poaching cases either a current or former employee was involved. According to the minister of environment and tourism, Pohamba Shifeta, 27 rhino have been poached this year. Eight of the animals were white rhino, of which seven were poached on privately owned properties, and one in Etosha National Park. Of the 19 black rhino poached, 13 were in Etosha National Park, four in the free-ranging Kunene population, and two on custodian properties. Shifeta said the situation demands a review and update of current strategies and measures to curb illegal hunting on black rhino custodian and private farms with white rhino.

“As poaching groups increase in size, number and sophistication, it is more important than ever that law enforcement responses are robust, reliable and effective.”

According to Shifeta wildlife trafficking has become a multi-million-dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded to more than just a conservation concern. “The increased involvement of organized crime in poaching and wildlife trafficking promotes corruption, threatens peace, strengthens illicit trade routes, destabilises economies and communities that depend on wildlife and their livelihoods.”

He said the number of black rhino under custodianship has grown to such an extent that the programme has become its own source of animals for further translocation, and a few animals could even be translocated back to Etosha as required. The custodianship programme now hosts over 500 black rhinoceros from 24 freehold properties.

According to him the number of privately owned white rhino has increased steadily over the past few years to over 700 animals on 69 freehold properties by the end of 2016, mainly through imports from South Africa. “The sudden increase in rhino poaching in South Africa during the past few years made Namibia, amongst other southern African countries, such as Botswana, very attractive as a country of import for white rhinoceros despite an increase in rhino crimes in Namibia.”

Shifeta added that short and longer-term strategic measures that have been put in place to help combat wildlife crime involve matters of human capacity, surveillance, patrols and detection, investigative and intelligence work, criminal investigations, legal frameworks and prosecution, community care and engagement, monitoring and database support, as well as proactive planning and adaptive management.

“One of the measures our farmers have to take is to cooperate in proper vetting of all employees at their respective farms.”

He said the ministry is also aware that custodians are concerned about the risks of poaching, including the safety of themselves and their personnel and the lack of mechanisms from the side of government to offer more assistance and create greater incentives for keeping black rhinos.

“I would like to take this opportunity to publicly condemn ill-intentioned activities of rhino and elephant poaching and call upon all those involved to refrain from such activities with immediate effect or risk their chances of being caught and face the



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/owners-must-vet-workers2017-09-080.jpg>)  
 SECURITY MEASURES: The minister of environment and tourism, Pohamba Shifeta, and the head of human resources of the Namibian Police, Commissioner Abed Kashihakumwa.  
 Photo: ELLANIE SMIT

full wrath of the law.”

The inspector-general of the Namibian Police, Sebastian Ndeitunga, also called on farmers to cooperate with police and to do proper vetting of employees that work with rhino.

In a speech read on his behalf by the head of human resources of the Namibian police, Commissioner Abed Kashihakumwa, he said proactive measures to poaching are not fully harmonised with farmers and therefore they should be more vigilant when safeguarding rhino.

Ndeitunga expressed concern over the new trend in poaching on privately owned farms and said strategies are needed to address the onslaught on rhino.

According to him the police are closely interacting with the ministry in an effort to combat poaching and a total of 280 police members have been deployed on a three month rotational basis in national parks.

However he pointed out that although successes have been recorded much still needs to be done, especially with regards to rhino custodians and private rhino owners that have now become targets.

Ndeitunga said farmers must cooperate more closely with the police and establish conditions of employment and screen workers.

The majority of cases that are being reported on privately owned land involve employees, he said.

He urged farmers to do proper patrols and establish a dedicated anti-poaching team, saying that this is paramount.

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