

Initiative to save the pangolin

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Page no: 1



THE Namibian Chamber of Environment has launched an outreach programme to educate Namibians about the precarious status of the pangolin.

The initiative, which involves producing large posters and thousands of business card-sized mini-posters for distribution countrywide, is to raise awareness and appeal to every Namibian to help stop the illegal trade in the animal.

A cash reward is also offered for information leading to the arrest of people catching, killing and trading in pangolins and for information leading to the seizure of captured pangolins or pangolin parts and products.

According to NCE, pangolins are the most widely trafficked mammals in the world.

The biggest demand for them is in Asia, especially China where the scales, made of keratin like our fingernails, hair and rhino horns, are used in traditional medicines and ornaments.

"The scales have no medicinal properties. It is a myth that causes huge environmental damage and threatens the survival of these species. Pangolin meat is also sold at top prices in Asian restaurants," said NCE in a statement.

Pangolins are insectivores that eat as many as 70 million ants and termites per pangolin per year. This controls the insect numbers, contributing to the delicate balance of the ecosystems they inhabit.

Termites eat grass and woody vegetation and without pangolins to eat termites, the carrying capacity of Namibia's rangelands for livestock and wildlife would be significantly reduced.

Pangolin trafficking has resulted in all eight species of these little-known creatures being categorised as threatened under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red Data listing.

Only one species of pangolin occurs in Namibia, Temminck's ground pangolin *Smutsia temminckii*, also known as the Cape pangolin or the scaly anteater.

In recent months, there has been a marked increase in the illegal capture, killing and trade in pangolins in Namibia for the international markets in Asia.

"We need a collective national effort to tackle the problem of illegal trade in pangolins to Asia. Also involved in this initiative are the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Namibia's communal conservancies and their NGO support organisations under Nacso, and WWF.

The numbers to call or SMS are: 081 413 2214 or 081 423 2231, day or night.

