



1 200 rhinos in private care

Poaching remains a major threat

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While about 1 200 rhinos in Namibia are now in private care, the country is still experiencing high levels of poaching, with 29 rhinos poached this year already.

This was announced during a national meeting on rhino security attended by custodians of black rhinos and private owners of white rhinos.

Environment deputy minister Bernadette Jagger said in the past five days, three suspects were arrested at Divundu in the Kavango East Region for the illegal possession of three rhino horns. One suspect was also arrested at Katima Mulilo for the illegal possession of five pairs of elephant tusks.

"Unprecedented levels of elephant and rhino poaching across Africa are being experienced and Namibia is no exception. This threatens these species and the ecosystem they inhabit," said Jagger.

She said wildlife trafficking has become a million-dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded to more than just a conservation concern.

According to Jagger, the increasing involvement of organised crime in poaching and wildlife trafficking promotes corruption, threatens peace, strengthens illicit trade routes, destabilises economies and communities that depend on wildlife for their livelihoods.

Elaborating on the National Rhino Custodian Programme that was established in 1993, she said this has been Namibia's greatest conservation success ever and is largely due to private citizens working together with government in an exemplary way.

The custodian programme now hosts 500 black rhinos in 28 sub-populations, which occur from the Orange River to the Kunene Region.

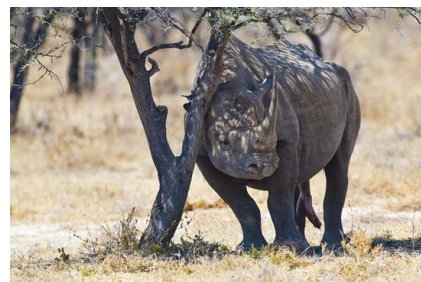
"We are aware that custodians are concerned about the risk of poaching, including the safety of themselves and their personnel and the lack of mechanisms from the side of government to offer more assistance and create greater incentives for keeping black rhinos," Jagger said.

She explained that although all black rhinos remain state-owned, the programme enables private persons with land to apply for custodianship.

She said strategic black rhino translocations have been carried out under the programme since 1993.

This has not only expanded the rhino range but also established a viable breeding population. It has also contributed to the stimulation of high density populations in national parks, from which most of the animals have been sourced for the programme.

Jagger said the number of black rhinos 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 national parks, as required.



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SAFER: About 1 200 rhinos are now in private care in Namibia, either through the black rhino custodian programme or via private ownership.
Photo: NWR

According to her the southern white rhino is present in some of Namibia's national parks, while the private sector has also played a vital role in re-establishing populations on free-hold land.

"White rhinos can be privately owned in Namibia, the ministry strictly controls all imports, exports, internal movements and hunting of white rhinos through CITES."

The number of privately-owned white rhinos have increased steadily over the past years to over 700 animals on 69 freehold properties by the end of 2017, mainly through the imports from South Africa.

"Poaching has severe economic implications through adverse impacts on tourism, trophy hunting and the conservation of the species," said Jagger.

She said short and long-term strategic measures 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 prosecutions.

It also involves community care and engagement, monitoring and database support, as well and proactive planning and adaptive management.

ELLANIE SMIT