



LAC trains legal fraternity on wildlife crime

17 September 2018 | Crime

The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) last week held a training workshop on wildlife crime for 16 representatives of the legal fraternity, police officers and park wardens from the environment ministry.

At the four-day training, law enforcement officers, magistrates and prosecutors came together to receive uniform training and discuss a targeted area of crime.

The training was held at Divundu in the Kavango East Region and was facilitated by the Legal Assistance Centre, Advocate Daniel Small, two project officers from TRAFFIC Wildlife Trade Monitoring Network and a private investigator.

This was the second in a series of three workshops funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aimed to cover the regions in Namibia mostly affected by wildlife crime.

The workshop focused on anti-poaching and wildlife crimes as they relate to the participants' everyday jobs as police, magistrates or prosecutors and created an opportunity to bring three prongs of the anti-poaching and wildlife crime process together and foster discussion and idea-sharing. According to the LAC they learned more about the legislation and realities surrounding wildlife crimes in the context of their daily jobs, and are now able to bring ideas back to their teams.

"They also faced the grim realities of rhino poaching and were reminded of the importance of working as a team to combat such atrocities," said the LAC.

Deputy Chief Magistrate Claudia Claasen highlighted the importance of the workshop. "It was time to see wildlife crime not as isolated crime.

Our wildlife must be seen as national resources and the courts must guard and function as gatekeepers of these resources." She said the state and the legal system cannot afford a laid-back approach, as these crimes are depriving the national treasury of income.

"It is time to take action and fight wildlife crime.

I urge participants to take wildlife crime more seriously, and reiterate that wildlife crime shall be considered as serious as murder and rape."

Claasen said the recently amended penalty clauses dealing with wildlife crime, as introduced by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, serve this purpose too, and hence, wildlife crime will be taken more serious from now onwards.



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LUCRATIVE: Wildlife crime has become increasingly dangerous and lucrative. PHOTO: FILE