



No bail for repeat offenders

Minister Shifeta puts foot down

12 February 2019 | Environment

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta says some of the 120 suspects arrested last year for wildlife crimes were repeat offenders who were out on bail for similar crimes.

“It is discouraging when a suspect is arrested for a crime today and the next day commits the same crime again. We do not want to tell justice what to do, but a repeat offender should not be let out on bail,” Shifeta said yesterday.

According to him workshops are currently taking place to sensitise magistrates and prosecutors on wildlife crime.

“We are also looking at how to pursue the handlers. We know who these people are. They have set up shop at places like Oshakati, Outapi, Oshikango and around the Etosha National Park, but they are involved in illicit activities. It is a matter of time until we catch them red-handed.”

Shifeta also stressed that if a foreigner is sentenced or fined for a wildlife crime in Namibia, they will not be allowed into the country again after paying their fine or serving their sentence.

Equipment to the value of N\$6.8 million will be donated to Namibia over the next few years by the United States government to combat wildlife crime.

This includes four vehicles, GPS receivers, camping equipment, furniture for the Waterberg anti-poaching training centre, poaching crime scene investigation equipment and binoculars.

The donation is funded by through the US Foreign Military Financing Programme for Biodiversity. Shifeta yesterday received the first donation of 65 pairs of low-light binoculars from US ambassador to Namibia, Lisa Johnson.

“These 65 pairs of low-light binoculars are the first items to be delivered,” said Johnson.

Johnson said that wildlife crime is pushing some of the world's most emblematic species toward extinction and driving a lucrative criminal industry around the world.

“Wildlife crime is also a critical threat to economic development. It undermines security and threatens legitimate economies.”

According to Johnson, wildlife is an important cultural and economic asset for Namibia, contributing significantly to tourism and sustaining the livelihoods of thousands of Namibians.

She added that the US currently has projects valued at nearly N\$300 million dedicated to conservation and combatting wildlife crime in Namibia.

Shifeta said that the donated equipment will be used to facilitate training programmes for employees, with the view to sharpening their skills to better manage wildlife crime.

“Ultimately our capacity to fight wildlife crime will be greatly enhanced through this generous donation.”



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse/bail-for-repeat-offenders2019-02-120.jpg>)
HELPING HAND: Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta and US ambassador to Namibia, Lisa Johnson, test the binoculars that the US donated to the ministry. Photo: ELLANIE SMIT

Shifeta said if the equipment is misused it constitutes misconduct and the public must also report any misuse of these assets.

He stressed that the ministry and other law-enforcement agencies will not relent in fighting wildlife crime wherever it happens. "To this end the ministry has been working hard to recruit the requisite staff for the anti-poaching unit, albeit that the process is slow. I am, however, confident that all key positions will soon be filled."

He said that wildlife crime, particular poaching, is a global challenge which requires a global solution.

According to the director of parks and wildlife management in the environment ministry, Colgar Sikopo, a total of 57 rhino and 26 elephants were poached last year. This year no elephants have been poached so far and only one black rhino has been killed by poachers.

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