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Senior cop arrested over rhino poaching

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A senior police officer at Oshakati's protected resources unit was the mastermind behind the poaching incidences which occurred in Etosha National Park last month.

In an interview with New Era yesterday, Minister of Environment and Tourism Pohamba Shifeta confirmed that two rhinos have been poached to date this year, where a senior police officer who is heading the protected resources unit was involved.

Shifeta said the police officer together with other members of the Oshakati Town Council were arrested when caught red handed while removing the horns of two poached rhinos in the Etosha National Park last month.

Both suspects appeared in the Oshakati Magistrate's Court and were denied bail.

"There is a syndicate. The middleman is a police officer who was commanding the protected resource unit. Imagine, someone who is supposed to protect the wildlife is involved in poaching. They appeared and were denied bail. It's a serious matter, especially when it involves a senior police officer," Shifeta said.

Shifeta said there were incidences of poaching last year which involved soldiers.

The minister revealed in 2019, 45 rhinos were poached, compared to 74 in 2018, 55 in 2017, 61 in 2016 and 97 in 2015.

As for elephants, he noted 12 were poached in 2019, 27 in 2018, 50 in 2017, 101 in 2016 and 49 in 2015.

No records of elephants poached this year.

Shifeta revealed for all these illegal hunting activities and illegal possession of game products, 87 cases were opened in 2019 with 201 people arrested, compared to 115 cases in 2018 with 138 people arrested.

Another 76 cases were recorded in 2017 with 123 people arrested, 135 cases in 2016 with 82 people arrested, and 91 cases in 2015 with 96 people arrested.

A total number of 26 firearms were seized while 27 vehicles were impounded.

He further said about 201 people arrested in 2019, 182 people are Namibians, nine are Zambians, seven are Angolans, two are French and one Mozambican.

"The year 2019 was characterized by a high number of cases, arrests and rhino, and pangolin poaching or trafficking. The number of arrests is significantly higher than in the previous years, which also had a lower percentage of arrests related to rhino, elephant and pangolin," he said.

He added arrests and seizures related to rhinos have remained relatively stable, while a high number of pre-emptive arrests continued to stop poachers before they killed animals.

Equally, he maintained arrests and seizures related to both elephant and pangolin have increased, with pangolin cases showing the most alarming rise.

He congratulated the staff members of the environment ministry, the Namibian Police Force, the

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heral's office, Ministry of Justice, the communities, the donors and everyone involved in the fight against

police officers, wardens and all personnel in parks at the country's iconic species

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