



Securing a poaching scene

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SECURE: The course participants demonstrate what they learnt about securing a poaching scene and collecting evidence. Photo: ISAP/DIRK HEINRICH

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Intelligence Support Against Poaching (ISAP) recently held a course on how to handle a poaching scene correctly.

The animal crime scene and evidence handling course took place from 16 to 19 July, and was presented by Wildlife Vets Namibia.

Participants included veterinarians, lodge managers, wildlife farmers, members of crime prevention forums, hunting farm owners, students and representatives of the tourism industry. While participants received detailed information on the complexity of gathering evidence at a poaching scene, it was also stressed that they are not police officers or experts in collecting evidence. The main aim is to partner with the police and assist them by properly securing a crime scene and valuable evidence, according to ISAP.

Lectures

Most of the lectures were handled by well-known veterinarian and owner of a game capture unit, Dr Ulf Tubbesing, and his assistant Mariska Bijsterbosch.

Professional photographer Dirk Heinrich handled part of the theory and practical sessions on crime scene photography. Members of the K9 unit also demonstrated how their dogs can be used to track down poachers and other criminals, while a representative of Bushwackers explained the use of metal detectors at a crime scene.

Background on poaching

Tubbesing gave some background on poaching and pointed out that not only is the poaching of rhinos and elephants a serious crime, but also the poaching of pangolins, birds and antelopes.

He said every poaching scene is a crime scene as it involves animals that were killed illegally.

Moreover, the poachers trespassed either on state or private property, often use illegal ways of killing animals and frequently handle non-licensed weapons and ammunition (stolen rifles and bullets).

Tubbesing said when poaching antelope like oryx or kudu, poachers sometimes use dogs to corner the animals and then kill them with spears, which is against the law.

Gathering evidence

“Poaching warthog and transporting the meat from one district to another is a serious offence in terms of veterinary laws. Farmers and owners of game and domestic stock should use all possible means to increase the charges against such criminals to make sure they receive the maximum punishment,” Tubbesing added. To achieve this, it is important to find, secure and gather as much evidence as possible.

Tubbesing further said crime is often fuelled by opportunity, and to get the culprits behind bars, it is important to secure evidence and have enough evidence backed up safely, in case it gets lost or a corrupt or incompetent official handles the case.

DNA samples

He further said the use of DNA samples is becoming increasingly important. He explained what DNA is, how to preserve this crucial part of evidence, how and where DNA can be found and how it should be collected and

preserved. He added that having a database with DNA of criminals is as important as having a database of rhinos and other vulnerable animals in different countries, to be able to trace criminals internationally or to link evidence to a specific country or area.

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