

**WORLD NEWS**

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Rhino poaching in Namibia down 63% on tougher policing, penalties

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WINDHOEK, Aug 7 (Reuters) - Rhino poaching fell 63% year-on-year in Namibia, the ministry of environment said on Friday, citing intensified intelligence operations by authorities and tougher sentences and fines for poachers.

FILE PHOTO: A pair of White Rhinoceros await buyers in pens at the annual auction in the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi national park, South Africa, September 18, 2010. REUTERS/Mike Hutchings/File Photo/File Photo

Elephant poaching, which takes places to a lesser extent, also decreased, with 2 incidents reported this year compared with 13 in 2019, the ministry said.

The southern African nation is home to the second largest white rhino population in the world after South Africa, non-profit organisation Save the Rhino says. Namibia also holds one-third of the world's remaining black rhinos.

Rhino poaching has plagued the southern Africa region for decades, especially in neighbouring South Africa and Botswana, leading to anti-poaching programmes, including de-horning and strict policing.

Nambia has increased fines for poaching to 25,000,000 Namibian dollars (1.09 million pounds) from 200,000 and prison sentences have risen to 25 years from 20.

Rhinos are hunted and killed for their horns to feed rising demand, mostly in Asia, where affluent classes regard them as a status symbol. They are also used as medicine.

Spokesman for Namibia's Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Romeo Muyanda, said rhino poaching had decreased from 46 in 2019 to 17 incidents so far in 2020.

Intensified ground and aerial patrols were the main reason, while collaboration with members of the public and the stiffer sentences for convicted poachers also helped bring about the decline.

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“Another factor is the excellent collaboration with law enforcement agencies, such as the Namibian Police, the Namibian Defence Force and the Namibia Central Intelligence,” the spokesman said.

The ban on international travel imposed in March in response to the coronavirus was not a big factor in the drop in poaching.

Reporting by Nyasha Nyaungwa; editing by Mfuneko Toyana and Barbara Lewis

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