

FIND YOUR NEXT DREAM CAR

Browse a wide selection of pre-owned vehicles online.



AUTOMARK
CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED VEHICLES
New to you



The data is clear: Don't poach rhinos, you will get caught

News - Environment | 2020-10-01

by [Helge Denker](#)

Page no: 7



SAVING RHINOS ... Pre-emptive arrests have saved dozens of rhinos and put numerous suspects behind bars. Photo: Helge Denker

The Rhino Files are periodic articles exploring the complexity of rhino conservation in Namibia.

AGAIN and again, people think they can make quick dirty money and get away with it. Rhino horn is extremely sought after in Asia, smugglers pay high prices, and Namibia has a healthy rhino population. Rhino poaching must be a source of easy money.

WRONG!

Because Namibia has such a healthy rhino population, criminals do manage to poach some rhinos. In the country's vast wild spaces, rhinos roam free. It's not possible to protect every single rhino all of the time from well-organised, unscrupulous killers and internationally linked syndicates. But the few poachers who do get through will soon realise the folly of their ways – no matter how well organised or well connected they think they are.

Namibia doesn't just do anti-poaching patrols to protect rhinos. A broad suite of initiatives is in place to combat wildlife crime. These include community participation, monitoring and surveillance, security infrastructure, multi-agency partnerships, private sector support, international collaboration and more. Yet foremost among them are superb law-enforcement mechanisms to find, arrest and prosecute perpetrators.

In public statements, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism has often underlined that wildlife crime doesn't pay in Namibia. But actions – and statistics – speak louder than words. The data is very clear. Yes, some rhinos are being killed, but the poachers are being caught. And not just a few. And not only occasionally.

Rhino poaching is one of the wildlife crime sectors of the biggest concern in Namibia. The country has managed to effectively rebuild its population of rhinos since independence. The black rhino was brought back from critical lows reached just prior to independence, while the white rhino was reintroduced after it had become locally extinct in Namibia around the 1850s. Both rhino species once again occur in healthy populations, spread across a number of state-protected areas, community conservancies and private reserves.

The commercial poaching onslaught that has hit Namibia over the past decade is threatening to erode the country's conservation success. Yet Namibians are not sitting idly by. Rural communities, the private sector, NGOs and international funding agencies are actively collaborating with the Namibian government to counter this threat.

In the majority of rhino-poaching cases registered between mid-2018 and mid-2020, suspects have been arrested. The strong partnership between regional units of the ministry and the police and Operation Blue Rhino has enabled these achievements. The Blue Rhino task team has also prioritised the investigation of old cases. Here, too, suspects continue to be arrested.

The arrests have not only put people who've shot rhinos behind bars, but have included a large number of kingpins, dealers and other aiders and abettors.

Some 278 suspects have been arrested on charges related to rhino poaching or trafficking between the inception of Blue Rhino in mid-2018 and the end of August 2020.

Importantly, many criminals are arrested before they manage to kill a rhino.

Pre-emptive arrests of suspects conspiring to poach rhinos are enabled by rigorous investigations, excellent collaboration and reliable information networks. Pre-emptive arrests have become a central feature of Namibian law enforcement. During 2019, over 60% of all arrests related to rhinos were pre-emptive arrests.

Between the inception of Blue Rhino and the end of August 2020, at least three dozen rhinos were actively saved from being killed in 29 separate pre-emptive arrest cases.

Entire syndicates are being arrested and rhino poaching is being suppressed. How many rhinos are being saved by the knock-on effect is difficult to quantify. Because Namibia has a healthy number of rhinos, people may think rhino poaching may be lucrative. But the data makes it clear: Don't do it – you will get caught.