

K9 unit helps sniff out poachers

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ETOSHA – Although poaching of endangered species such as rhino and elephant have been reported to be minimal in the Etosha National Park, environment minister Pohamba Shifeta has called on law enforcement officials to do ballistic testing among communities adjacent to the park.

Shifeta made the call Wednesday when he was briefed on the security situation cluster on anti-poaching operation ‘Yes Ongava’ phase 18 in the Etosha National Park.

Anti-poaching unit commander Chief Inspector George Shitana said the situation was relatively under control, adding that no poaching of wildlife has been reported for nearly three months as most of the culprits are behind bars.

Shifeta, however, insisted law enforcement should carry out ballistic testing on weapons and ammunition owned by those who live near the park.

Shifeta said Namibia has about 60% of the world’s black rhino population, therefore such endangered species should be protected at all costs.

Shitana said 121 arrests have been made over the last three months. This, he said, was largely attributed to the five dogs at the K9 unit in the park which were bought at a cost of N\$65 000 each from Holland in 2017. The dogs are highly trained to detect rhino horns, elephant tusks, weapons and ammunition, among other contraband goods.

The unit also plans to bring on board 12 horses next year to complement the efforts of the dogs and vehicle and aerial patrols in the fight against poaching.

Although he thanked the K9 unit and the whole anti-poaching unit, Shifeta said areas around Etosha should be monitored. “We want to ensure poaching is reduced. We don’t want cases of poaching in Etosha. You should consult the chiefs and mix with these people. You will learn more. Sometimes these people have information that will lead you to information. Firearms of people living around Etosha should be tested,” he advised law enforcement officials.

He said every time poachers are arrested, law enforcement officials should inform traditional leaders so that they are charged also through customary law.

Shitana said poaching attempts were made in August this year, however, the suspects were intercepted before they could carry out their deeds. He cited a budding businessman who has since been arrested as he has created a syndicate of poaching and selling the rhino horns to a certain foreign national. The police said they know who the foreign national is and are to arrest him soon.

“So far, poachers resort to illegal hunting for meat. The most problematic area is Etosha west from villages such as Otjinova, Onamatanga, Uutsathima, Amarika and Okakewa,” he said.

According to him, the anti-poaching unit security cluster came up with another strategy of community engagement. He said the anti-poaching unit had an audience with all traditional authorities that border Etosha National Park such as Ondonga, Uukwambi, Ongandjera and the Vita Tom Royal House.

He explained that the primary objective of such a visit was to seek permission to conduct an awareness campaign with the community members on the issues related to poaching and the

handling of firearms.
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