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Anti-poaching units 'can not stay ahead' Unemployment may drive crime

28 July 2021 | [Additions](#)





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Elvira Hattingh - "Not a night goes by where there is no poaching anywhere. I can not keep up, the thing gets out of hand. It's a concern. "

So says Mr. Rickus Spangenberg of Windhoek K9 Academy, who trains dogs to cut the tracks of livestock and game thieves and catch them.

He says this type of crime has increased drastically in recent months and the setting of wire traps, for hunting with dogs and off the road with a silencer on guns, is currently the order of the day.

"Livestock and game thieves have already become very smart. They have different registration marks for the cars they use for poaching and they often know where cameras are and avoid those roads. They sit for hours and think about their plans," says Spangenberg.

He does not foresee an end to farm theft any time soon, especially not with Covid-19 restrictions that leave more and more people unemployed and hungry. In addition, syndicates are also involved in farm theft.

"Another problem is that the average farmer is older and does not always have the strength to secure his farm at night. If he worked cattle all day, he still can't do it," he says.

Spangenberg says he started his dog unit with only three people, but now employs nearly 130 people. He says anti-poaching units are a good antidote, but it costs money, while sponsorships are scarce.

"It may be time for farmers to look after their cattle with guards and horses during the day and let their cattle sleep in kraals at night. However, everything costs money.

"Farming communities can come together and then appoint and pay as a group anti-poaching units to look after areas," he suggests. He says they hope to be able to purchase paragliders in the future, as well as equipment for night vision. However, the items are very expensive.

On top of that, the anti-poaching work is very dangerous and a guard running with a dog cutting tracks cannot carry heavy weapons with them. "However, it is my passion and I will do it for as long as I can," he said.

SUCCESS

Another of the country's largest anti-poaching units, Nyime,'s Mr. Stephen Weyand says they have also recently seen an increase in crime on farms, especially when it comes to setting traps and poaching game and livestock.

"However, we have had many successes in areas such as Hochveld and here and there in Omitara, where the instigators of these types of crimes have been caught," he said. He added that they receive very good co-operation from the police everywhere when it comes to fighting farm crimes.

He says that especially in places where anti-poaching units operate, crime is under control. In places like Kamanjab, for example, breakthroughs have yet to be made.

Weyand says it is important that farmers are constantly aware of what is going on on their farms, patrol and keep their line wires clean and regularly look for foreign footprints.

Nyime also owns a K9 dog unit and has gone from strength to strength since its inception in 2013 and now works all over the country. It currently employs 150 people and even helps protect several of the government's rhino and elephant reserves, in addition to combating poaching on private commercial land.

DESPERATE

The CEO of Intelligence Support Against Poaching (Isap), Mr. Fritz Kaufmann says the whole country is currently under pressure when it comes to crimes on farms, especially the Otjozondjupa region where "many things are going on".

"The people are hungry, there is no work, money or food," he says.

He says he does not speak well of poaching, but noticing people is desperate. "You also get those who drive it commercially and the meat is sold so that someone can fill their pockets with money."

He says the curfew rule complicates matters for farmers who sometimes have to drive around to ensure the safety of their farms.

He says farmers are currently under financial pressure, especially after the recent droughts during which they lost a lot of livestock and game.

Kaufmann agrees that vigilance and vigilance are farmers' best defense against crime. "Pay attention to strange cars driving around, they take registration marks. Let your neighbors know if you notice strange vehicles," he says.

He says radio connections within farming communities are increasingly being used and are essential for farm safety. "We see in many of the crimes on farms that it was 'inside jobs'," he said. He says farmers must also stay in touch with their own farm workers.

STATISTICS

The Nossob Crime Prevention Forum (NCPF), which keeps statistics on the theft of game and livestock, as well as infrastructure in the Omitara, Witvlei and Steinhausen area,'s chairman, mr. Jürgen Matthaei, is also of the opinion that it has increased again, especially recently.

In the first six months of 2021 alone, farmers in the area have already suffered losses of N \$ 900 500 in theft - more than double the losses experienced in the first half of 2020.

At that time, joint losses of just under N \$ 400 000 were suffered.

Since January this year, small stock worth N \$ 121 500 has been stolen in the area, as well as large stock with an estimated value of N \$ 529 250, game worth N \$ 102 750 and other items worth about N \$ 147 000.

January and March were the months when theft was at its peak, with N \$ 109,500 worth of small stock stolen in January alone and N \$ 132,000 worth of large stock in March. In the last month, other items, such as infrastructure worth N \$ 132 000, were also stolen in the area.

Livestock and game appear to be among the most popular items stolen in this area, which includes the Omitara, Witvlei and Steinhausen areas.

In 11 months in 2020 alone, farmers from the area reported losses of more than N \$ 1.65 million due to theft to the NCPF.