



## Inside the mind of a wildlife crime offender

National parks are the prime hunting grounds for convicted poachers serving time in Namibian prisons, a new study has found.

0 0 0

[Submit a response](#)

26 January 2021 | [Crime](#)

ILLEGAL: More than 40 wildlife offenders incarcerated in Namibia were interviewed on why they had turned to the illegal wildlife trade. Photo: FILE

ELLANIE SMIT

WINDHOEK

A total of 45 offenders who are incarcerated in six Namibian prisons have lifted the lid on why they turned to the illegal wildlife trade.

The 'Trading Years for Wildlife' report by TRAFFIC reveals how economic, social, nutritional, and functional factors motivated the offenders to commit the crimes they are now serving sentences for.

TRAFFIC is a leading organisation working globally on illegal trade in wild animals and plants.



The results of the two-year study provide considerable insight into the socio-demographic and psychographic profiles of low-level offenders, as well as the nature and modus operandi of their crimes.

The offenders interviewed were convicted for unlawful hunting, trade, and possession of eight different species across 31 cases. They faced a total of 92 charges under seven acts, to which many pleaded guilty.

The origin locations for 25 of the 31 cases were in Namibia, while five cases were in Angola and one case was in Zambia.

#### Poaching in parks

It reveals how some offenders identified the Zambezi Region, which lies within the Kavango-Zambezi Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA), as the local hub for trading of wildlife products.

Kongola, Rundu, and Windhoek were also implicated as local locations for transit or sale of wildlife products, while Bwabwata, Mudumu, Nkasa Rupara, and Etosha National Parks were identified as the sources for elephant, lion, and rhino products.

The research also reveals that many of the offenders lacked understanding of the repercussions of being arrested and the impact that it would have on their families. Custodial sentences being served by the offenders ranged from one to 14 years with some receiving direct imprisonment, with no option of paying a fine to be released.

“When I got sentenced and came to prison, it is when I also realised that now my kids cannot go to better schools because I am here. I am not the one who is paying for them, they are also now suffering the consequences of my actions,” one of the offenders stated.

The report points out that Namibia is considered a source country for many wildlife species as well as a transit country for wildlife products.

All offenders interviewed were male. Most offenders (35) were under 39 years old at the time of their arrest, and 15 of them were in their twenties.

Many (18) had completed grades during their primary schooling, while fewer (9) had completed grades in high school, and only one offender had received tertiary education.

Most were non-Namibian (25), specifically Zambian (20), Angolan (5), Chinese (3), and Zimbabwean (1), while 20 offenders were Namibian.

#### Money talks

Many offenders (19) reported that their reasons for getting involved in wildlife crime were financial, such as wanting money or more money to support themselves and their families, either supplementing their current income or generating income during a gap between employment.

Forty offenders described themselves as having dependents, of which 32 had between one and four dependents.

Of the 19 offenders who reported that their motivations were financial, 12 had a paying job at the time of their arrest, while seven were not receiving an employment income.

Of those who were financially motivated and had a job at the time of their arrest (12), four had formal employment, two had informal employment, six had vulnerable employment and 11 were subsistence farmers.

“These results show that only four offenders had high job security based on their formal employment.”

The numbers of financially motivated offenders who were in informal employment (2), vulnerable employment (6), or unemployed (7), combined represent 15 out of 19 offenders who were financially motivated to engage in IWT.

#### Ignorant

Only 11 offenders knew what the intended use of the wildlife products was. Although most offenders knew that the handling of wildlife products was illegal, this did not discourage them from engaging in the crime. “When asked if they would get involved in illegal wildlife trade again, all offenders said no. However, it should be noted that a few of the offenders had prior IWT convictions,” the report said.