



654 arrested for wildlife crimes

Despite more than 1 000 court hearings dealing with wildlife crimes taking place last year, environment minister said they continue to reverse the trends of poaching, with fewer cases recorded in the country.

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A total of 654 suspects was arrested in connection with 308 wildlife crime cases registered last year, of which 91% are Namibians.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said 597 Namibians were arrested last year for wildlife crimes, as well as 26 Zambians and 22 Angolan nationals.

One Motswana and one Zimbabwean were also arrested, as well as seven persons whose nationalities are not known.

Shifeta announced this at the launch of the revised national strategy on wildlife protection law enforcement and update on poaching and human wildlife conflict.

He added that 36 suspects were also arrested in connection with older cases registered before 2020.

The number of wildlife cases finalised in court is 104, while the number of suspects found guilty of wildlife-related charges stood at 162.

Meanwhile, 16 suspects were acquitted of wildlife-related charges.

Shifeta said 1 595 court hearings on wildlife crimes were recorded last year.

Poaching problem

Since the start of the current elephant and rhino poaching problem, government -through the environment ministry, supported by the law enforcement and security agencies - has put measures in place to address poaching in the country, he said.

“We continue to reverse the trends of poaching as we have once again recorded fewer cases of poaching in the country.”

According to him, 31 rhinos were poached last year compared to 52 in 2019, 81 in 2018, 55 in 2017, 66 in 2016 and 97 in 2015.

Also, only 11 elephants were poached last year, compared to 13 in 2019, 27 in 2018, 50 in 2017 and 101 in 2016 and 49 in 2015.

As for pangolins, the minister said eight live animals were seized last year as well as five full carcasses, 59 skins, five skin pieces and 924 scales.

He said of the more than 300 wildlife crime cases registered last year, 111 were related to high-value species.

A total of 52 cases are from the Khomas Region, 43 from Zambezi, 37 from Kunene, 29 from Omusati, 24 from Kavango East, 24 from Otjozondjupa, 20 from Omaheke, 19 from Erongo, 19 from Oshikoto, 11 from Oshana and 30 from other regions.

Shifeta further said of the cases registered last year, 100 were related to pangolin poaching and trafficking and 64 to elephant poaching and trafficking, while 113 were related to rhino poaching and trafficking.

He added that 68 firearms were seized last year, which included two assault rifles, five handguns and 47 rifle shotguns. Ammunition seized consisted of 1 333 bullets and 95 shotshells, while 48 vehicles were also impounded in connection with wildlife crimes.

Hard at work

“You can clearly see from the statistics that we have been hard at work to curb wildlife crime in the country and much success has been achieved.”

Shifeta added that a number of high-level perpetrators were arrested during 2020, particularly related to rhino poaching and trafficking.

“Arrests included kingpins, middlemen and various aiders and abettors, rather than only poachers.”

He said the technical team at the ministry has been instructed to design an amnesty form for those involved in wildlife crimes but not yet arrested to voluntarily hand themselves over to the authorities for possible protection from prosecution.

This will first be tabled by the technical ministerial committee on wildlife protection and law enforcement before it is submitted to be approved.

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