



No environment ministry staff implicated in poaching

To further enhance the conservation and protection of rhinos in Namibia, the environment ministry will this year be launching new conservation and management strategies for both black and white rhinos.

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19 February 2021 | [Environment](#)



KEEPING SAFE: Rhino poaching has declined inside national parks over the years. Photo: NAMPA

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The environment ministry has confirmed that thus far no ministry staff have been linked to rhino poaching cases in Namibia, while rhino poaching has declined in national parks over the years.

Ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda said confiscated rifles from staff in the Etosha National Park and ballistic tests conducted is an investigation with the police and, so far, no staff member has been linked to any poaching case.

“Should there be any such case, we will take action including criminal charges against that staff member.”

Muyunda said poaching in Namibia intensified from 2014. Prior to that, the country had zero poaching incidents over the years, he said.

He added that since the start of the poaching surge in Namibia, government and the ministry in particular have revisited strategies to counter those of poachers.

“Poaching has become commercialised with high incentives making it more challenging for wildlife authorities.”

Fines deter poachers

He said the increased fines in the Amendment Act of 2017 have served as deterrence to poachers.

“But this also demonstrates the significance we place on wildlife crimes in the country.”

He said although 81 rhino carcasses were recorded in 2018, there has been a decline in poaching over the years.

Only 38 of the 81 rhinos poached in 2018 were poached in national parks. In 2019, only 21 rhinos were poached in national parks, compared to 31 outside national parks.

Last year, 13 rhinos were poached in national parks, compared to 18 outside national parks.

This year, one rhino has thus far been recorded to be poached outside national parks, with zero rhinos poached inside national parks.

Impact of drought

He said although there have been concerns on the impact of drought on the conservation of rhinos, particularly in the Kunene Region, interventions were made to mitigate the situation. Furthermore, Muyunda said two rhinos died as a result of a fire in 2011 in Etosha.

“Since then, we have not recorded any mortalities as a result of fire.”

He explained that the fire that raged last year was a good fire that the ministry left to burn as part of management interventions.

“No rhinos were killed and, to the contrary, the vegetation has improved in those areas, especially with the current rain. The situation has also improved in Kunene with the recent rains. Namibia still has a healthy population of rhinos, which is currently growing,” he said.

Muyunda said to further enhance the conservation and protection of rhinos in Namibia, the ministry will this year be launching new conservation and management strategies for both black and white rhinos as well as an elephant management strategy.

“Poaching is a challenge for the ministry and even though the numbers are concerning, the status quo could have been worse if it was not for continued interventions.”