

"These cases not only represent important law enforcement successes, but are important for conservation with rhinos' lives saved," the report said.

Arrests during 2020 include a number of high-level criminals such as smugglers and international masterminds of wildlife crime syndicates.

"One of them is a mastermind of a neighboring country that has ties to end markets in Asia. "The other one is a high-ranking member of Namibian security forces who coordinated poaching in national parks," the report said.

"By 2020, joint operations between Namibia and Botswana led to the disruption of at least two syndicates targeting rhinos in both countries."

Another high-profile arrest is that of the popular self-proclaimed prophet, Pastor Jackson Babi, "who indicates that people from all walks of life can be involved in crime."

IVORY

Elephant poaching has declined significantly with only 11 elephants poached in 2020, but there is an increase in ivory seizures in the regions of Kavango and Zambezi, which are mainly from other countries.

"Namibia is working closely with Botswana and Zambia on cross-border law enforcement to tackle transnational game crime," the report said.

Ietermagos is still the most smuggled animal in 2020 with 74 seized - still less than the 129 confiscated ietermagos in 2019.

"Only eight of the 74 eater maggots were alive. Most seizures consisted of skins (59), "reads the report.

One of the success stories is South Africa, which passed intelligence information to the police via the US embassy, which led to the arrest of four suspected eater smugglers. A live ietermagô, four ietermagô sheets and two vehicles were seized.

The living ietermagô was rehabilitated and released.

In terms of the nationalities of wildlife criminals, Namibians make up 90% of all suspects.

Another milestone of 2020 is the finalization of the Revised National Strategy on Game Protection and Law Enforcement from 2021 to 2025.

BOSSLAGTERY

The Covid-19 pandemic also took its toll on wildlife crime with poaching for bush meat skyrocketing.

More than 200 carcasses of large antelopes were confiscated in 2020 with the highest incidence in the Erongo region.

Gemsboks are most poached (a total of 84 in 2020), followed by kudus (22), Hartmann mountain zebras (19) and five giraffes.

"The increase in bush meat poaching in some areas is due to the impact of Covid-19 on the livelihoods of communities," the report said. - francoise@republikein.com.na