



Kingpins, dealers among poaching suspects arrested in 2020

A ranked member of the Namibian security forces, who was using his position to coordinate poaching incursions into a national park, was arrested last year.

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ILLEGAL: More than 300 suspects were arrested for wildlife crime cases involving high-value species last year. Photo: FILE

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Among the more than 300 people arrested for wildlife crimes involving high-value species last year, several were important, high-level suspects that included dealers and kingpins.

According to the Combatting Wildlife Crime Annual Report 2020, a kingpin from a neighbouring country with “complex Namibian connections and links to end markets in Asia” was arrested in Namibia during a covert operation last year.

A suspect with dual nationalities under different aliases was also arrested while attempting to traffic contraband from regional sources into Namibia.

The report said the arrest was made possible through transboundary cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, a ranked member of the Namibian security forces, who was using his position to coordinate poaching incursions into a national park, was also arrested as well as a number of wildlife product dealers with diverse connections.

“Investigations in these cases are ongoing and no details can be divulged at this stage,” the report read.

Poaching prophet

It further mentioned the high-profile arrest of self-proclaimed and well-known prophet, Jackson Babi, last year.

Babi is alleged to have been involved in a number of rhino poaching incidents.

“The attempt by an associate of Babi to bribe investigators in the case while Babi was already in custody provides further evidence of criminal intent.”

The report said it also demonstrated the integrity of wildlife crime investigators and the support of the Anti-Corruption Commission. Court proceedings in the Babi case are ongoing.

Meanwhile, the report pointed out that a significant overlap of criminal activities in different spheres are being recorded in Namibia, with criminals dealing in anything that can be trafficked.

It said numerous cases have been registered where perpetrators of wildlife crimes were actively involved in other crimes such as robbery, house-breaking and fraud.

“The proliferation of firearms through wildlife crime is cause for concern. Unlicensed firearms appear to be readily available to criminals in many parts of the country.”

According to the report, these firearms are often locally adapted for specific needs, such as fitting silencers onto rifles to enable the undetected shooting of wildlife.

Premeditated crime

It said numerous cases have been recorded where firearms were buried in or near rhino ranges for future use during well-timed poaching incursions.

“Such actions are evidence of clearly organised, premeditated criminal intent.”

Wildlife crime has also been clearly shown to promote corruption, money laundering and various financial crimes.

The report added that there is a concerning trend of suspects absconding when released on bail.

Some released suspects have been found to have left the country to evade their court cases and the likelihood of conviction. Others have quickly become involved in new criminal activity. These trends are problematic for both law enforcement and prosecution, as they require additional law enforcement effort, delay prosecution and in many cases leave court cases pending indefinitely, it said.

Identity fraud

A case of identity fraud by a high-level suspect arrested during 2020 has underlined the extent of criminal deceit in high-value wildlife crime, the report noted.

“Criminals are going to great lengths to avoid legal detection and arrest.” Such scenarios clearly make it more difficult to trace suspects, especially if they abscond when out on bail and skip the country.

A total of 304 suspects were arrested in connection with wildlife crimes involving high-value species last year. This was a decrease of 31% from the previous year, the report noted.