

TOURISM

Wildlife crime decreases in 2020

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By Rosalia David

ACCORDING to the Combatting Wildlife Crime in Namibia Annual Report for 2020, rhino crimes accounted for most arrests during the past year, with 145 suspects having been detained.

“A significant number of these were pre-emptive arrests, where suspects were caught before they could kill a rhino. This is not only a highly commendable law enforcement success, but also a very positive conservation outcome. Pre-emptive arrests have directly saved numerous rhinos and will allow the population to continue to

multiply," the report stated.

The number of rhinos known to have been poached in Namibia during 2020 has decreased from 2019.

However, significantly more rhino horns were seized during 2020 compared to 2019.

The report further shows that arrests during 2020 included a number of high-level perpetrators, with significant international connections.

The breadth of arrests in cases related to rhinos, ranged from poachers to abettors to local dealers and international kingpins who have had a significant knock-on effect.

However, a significant decrease in registered wildlife crime cases and arrests was recorded in 2020 compared to 2019, the number of all registered cases and arrests decreased by 31 percent.

The number of cases related to high-value species decreased by 39 percent while cases related to high-value species made up around one third of all registered cases.

The number of elephants and rhinos known to have been poached in Namibia decreased, as did the number of pangolins seized.

"Important pre-emptive arrests in rhino cases continue to save the lives of numerous rhinos. Several important, high-level suspects were arrested during 2020. These included a kingpin from a neighbouring country with complex Namibian connections and links to end markets in Asia, who was arrested in Namibia during a covert operation."

A suspect with dual nationalities under different aliases was also arrested while attempting to traffic contraband from regional sources into Namibia during the last year and an arrest was made possible through trans-boundary cooperation with neighbouring countries.

The report says that, a ranked member of the Namibian security force, who was using his position to coordinate poaching incursions into a national park, was arrested, making it clear that no one is above the law.

"A number of Namibian wildlife product dealers with diverse connections were also arrested. Investigations in these cases are ongoing and no details can be divulged at this stage."

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