



Countries lose billions to wildlife crime

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Governments lose N\$100.6 to N\$172.4 billion per year in potential fiscal revenue from illegal logging, fishing and wildlife crime.

Despite the unprecedented global Covid-19 pandemic, the threat of wildlife crime continued in 2020, according to the International Consortium on Combatting Wildlife Crime (ICWC) annual report for 2020, titled 'Together Against Wildlife Crime'.

The report said despite considerable effort by the global community, wildlife crime remains a significant threat.

"Highly organised and transnational in nature, wildlife crime often involves other serious crimes such as violence, corruption, fraud and money laundering, presenting law enforcement authorities with an increasingly difficult and complex task in addressing it. Illegally traded wildlife specimens also evade veterinary checks and sanitary safety inspections, intensifying the risk of disease emergence."

The report pointed out that while N\$1.72 billion is spent on combatting wildlife crime each year in 67 African and Asian countries, a massive N\$431.1 billion is spent annually on drug crime in just the United States alone.

It further said between 2016 and 2018, the annual gross illicit income generated by ivory alone was estimated to be N\$5.75 billion and by rhino horns N\$3.3 billion.

"Wildlife crime affects not only the iconic animal species, but over 7 000 species of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)-listed wild animals and plants, driving many towards extinction. The Covid-19 pandemic illuminated the issue of wildlife crime and its role in intensifying the risk of disease emergence."

On the verge of extinction

The report added that 22% of species are on the verge of extinction, while the pangolin is the most trafficked animal in the world. Furthermore, on average, 150 rangers are killed every year in the line of duty to protect wildlife.

"Wildlife crime has become one of the most serious forms of transnational organised crime and often converges with other serious crimes, with the criminals involved taking advantage of the low risk and high profits. Despite progress made to date, these criminals still do not face the full force of the law and much work remains to be done."

Combatting crime of this magnitude cannot be done by a single country, organisation or sector, the report noted. It requires a global and holistic approach through cooperation across borders and across jurisdictions. It requires commitment, collaboration and engagement along the entire criminal justice chains.

The report further showcased how the consortium's partnerships with member states and other stakeholders have helped enhance the capacity of customs, police, wildlife authorities and the entire criminal justice system, enabling a strong, consistent, coordinated and increasingly effective response to wildlife crime.

Namibia

A massive 91% of the 304 suspects arrested for wildlife crimes of high-value species last year were Namibians, according to the environment ministry and police's annual wildlife crime report for 2020.

Suspects from neighbouring countries made up the rest of the arrests and included Angolans (5%), Zimbabweans (4%) and Batswana (0.4%).

The number of rhinos estimated to have been poached in Namibia reduced from 52 in 2019 to 31 in 2020.

There was, however, a significant increase in the number of rhino horns seized compared to previous years.

During 2018 and 2019, 13 and eight horns were recovered respectively, while in 2020, the number was 21. Arrests made relating to rhino horn poaching were 99 in 2020 compared to 62 in 2019.

Only 11 elephants are known to have been poached during 2020, while 13 were poached in 2019.

Last year, 62 ivory seizures were made and in 2019 115, while 127 arrests were made in 2019 and last year 64 suspects were arrested.

Pangolin was again the most-trafficked high-value species in Namibia during 2020, with 74 animals seized. This, however, represents a reduction in seizures compared to previous years (129 animals in 2019 and 88 in 2018). Only eight of the 74 animals seized in 2020 were alive, while most seizures consisted of skins (59).

A total of 175 suspects were arrested in 2019, while 103 suspects were arrested last year.