



## Rhino conservation efforts pay off

Namibia hosts the largest population of black rhinos remaining in Africa.

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GROWING: Namibia's rhino population is on the increase. Photo: FILE

ELLANIE SMIT

WINDHOEK

In the past decade Namibia's black rhino population have increased by more than 6% and its white rhinos have more than doubled.

This is according to the latest State of Rhino report, published by the International Rhino Foundation every September ahead of World Rhino Day on September 22.

But the report says wildlife crime is an ever-evolving challenge and requires collaboration and coordination within and between countries, as rhino horn trade is controlled by large criminal syndicates that operate multi-nationally.

It says while the act of poaching is often the most visible and most readily understood part of wildlife crime, it is the transport, trade and sale of illegal rhino horn from the protected area, across provincial boundaries and national borders to the end consumer that makes this crime not just possible, but profitable.

According to the report it is estimated that the rhino population in Africa is about 18 000, which represents a 12% decline in the past decade.

It notes that even though Africa's black rhino population remains an endangered species, it has seen an encouraging increase of about 17% over the past decade, to more than 5 600.

"Namibia hosts the largest meta-population of black rhinos remaining in Africa and is the stronghold of the southwestern subspecies, with approximately 90% of the total population of southwestern black rhinos found in the country."

Etosha

The report says that Etosha National Park now holds the world's largest black rhino population and rhino numbers are increasing steadily under a well-established and innovative conservation and management programme implanted by the country's government.

It says the future of the southwestern subspecies therefore largely depends on Namibia's ability to maintain adequate standards of protection.

"Despite huge challenges, thanks to the efforts of private and community reserves and government agencies, Namibia's black rhino population has increased by more than 6% in last ten years, while white rhinos have more than doubled in the same time," said Cathy Dean, CEO of Save the Rhino International (SRI).

Smuggling syndicates

Nina Fascione, executive director of International Rhino Foundation, said the demand for rhino horn destined for black markets remains a top threat to the survival of rhinos

"Continued coordination between countries for law enforcement is vital to breaking the hold of international criminal syndicates on trade."

Controlled by an organised criminal network that spans four countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana, rhino horn is smuggled to markets in Vietnam.

According to statistics provided by the environment ministry last month, ten rhinos have been poached this year.

In 2014 rhino poaching numbers stood at 56, increasing to 97 in 2015 and then dropping slightly to 66 in 2016 and 55 in 2017.

It then sharply increased again to 81 in 2018, dropping to 54 in 2019 and last year 32 rhinos were poached.

The ministry has attributed the decline in poaching to increased law enforcement activities against wildlife crimes through their collaboration with law enforcement agencies.

They said that their intelligence has also led to more arrests of perpetrators before the actual poaching. The arrests also serve as a deterrence.