

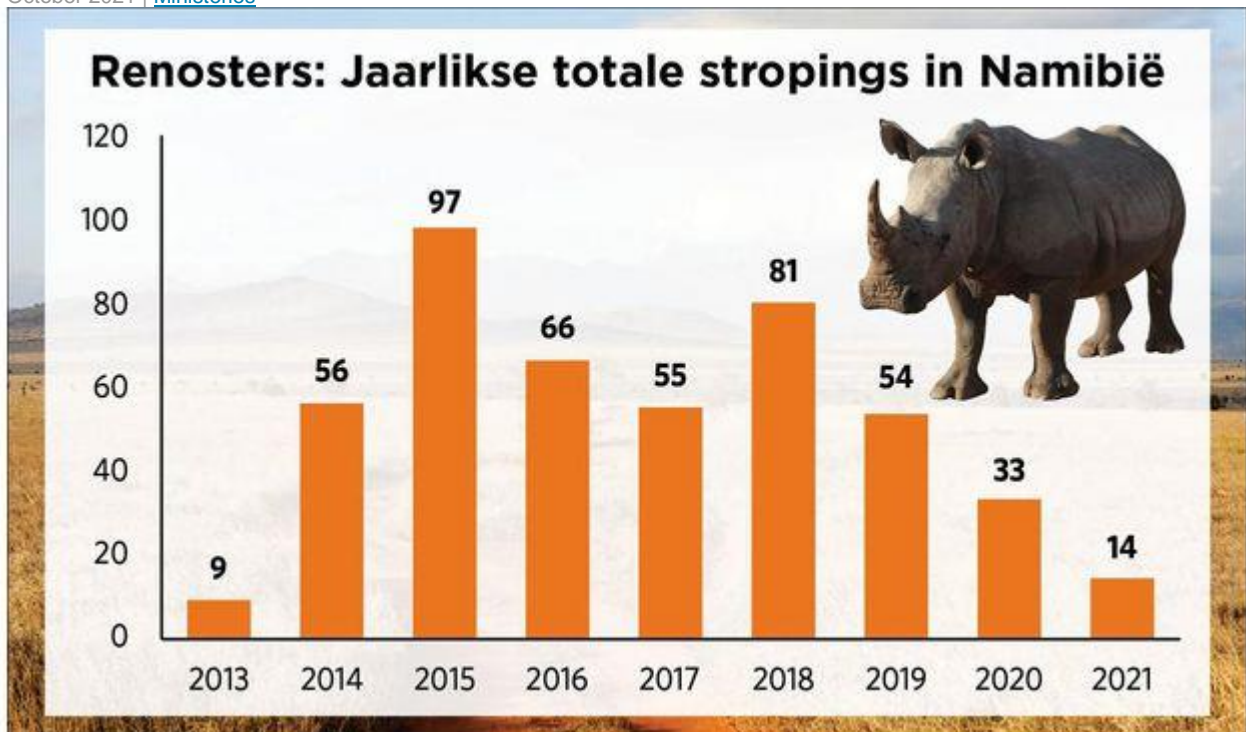
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Fight against game crime receives N \$ 92 million

Statistics released

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Ellanie Smit

While recent statistics indicate Namibia is winning the battle against wildlife crime and human-animal conflict, a project will be launched to bolster these efforts.

This according to the executive director of the environment, forestry and tourism, mr. Theophilus Nghitila.

He said this during the signing of the project document entitled "Integrated approach to proactive management of human-animal conflict and wildlife crime in hotspot landscapes in Namibia".

The project worth about N \$ 92 million aims to strengthen Namibia's efforts to prevent and combat human-animal conflict and wildlife crime by 2026.

He said the idea of the project originated in 2018 shortly after the sixth meeting of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

According to Nghitila, this project is in line with the government's national goals, adding that Namibia's Fifth National Development Plan has identified human-animal conflict and wildlife crime as two challenges to wildlife conservation that require management and adaptation.

He says cases of wildlife crime, especially involving elephants and rhinos, have declined significantly over the past few years.

According to the ministry, 14 rhinos have already been poached this year. These include six black rhinos from Etosha and one under the conservation program, as well as seven white rhinos.

Fifty-six rhinos were poached in 2014. That number rose to 97 in 2015, and dropped to 66 in 2016 and to 55 in 2017.

In 2018, 81 rhinos were poached, 54 in 2019 and 33 last year.

So far this year, five elephants have been poached compared to 12 in 2020. In 2014, when poaching increased, 78 elephants were poached and 101 in 2016. Since then, there has been a decrease in poaching by 50 in 2017, 27 in 2018 and 13 in 2019.

Nghitila said statistics from 2020-'21 also show a total decrease in human-animal conflict-related damage, especially regarding the loss of livestock and damage to croplands caused by wildlife.

Recent statistics provided by the ministry indicate that a total of 10 people were killed by wild animals during the 2020-21 financial year and 42 were injured, compared to the previous year's seven and 37 respectively.

The statistics indicate that 1 486 cases of human-animal conflict were reported during the same financial year, while 1 284 cases were investigated.

A total of 1,351 livestock were also killed by wild animals, while most were goats (571) and cattle (481).

A total of 844 hectares of crops were damaged of which elephants damaged 780 hectares.

A total of 1,577 cases of human-animal conflict were reported in 2019-20, while 1,398 cases were investigated.

In the financial year, 1,422 livestock, including cattle (701) and goats (337), were killed by wild animals.

A total of 1 589 hectares of crops were damaged of which elephants were responsible for 1 485.

"This is encouraging and undoubtedly the result of improved coordination between the various stakeholders, but also as a result of joint and purposeful interventions being undertaken."

However, he said they are also not naive and they know there are challenges that remain substantial and dynamic and that are constantly evolving.

Nghitila said in the case of human-animal conflict, it is also related to climate change.

According to him, challenges such as these require interventions that are innovative, scientific and preventative, so that the causes of the challenges can be tackled.

He said the high incidence of poverty in rural areas is unfortunately still a cause of human-animal conflict and wildlife crime.

The project is therefore aimed at generating economic benefits for communities from nature-related enterprises and strengthening the capabilities of conservation areas, communal farmers and government agencies to plan, manage and monitor human-animal conflict more effectively.

It will also focus on the capacity of anti-poaching units and stakeholders, and to strengthen science-based management and monitoring of populations of high-risk / high-value species.

He said this project would bring Namibia under the umbrella of the Global Partnership on Wildlife Conservation and Crime Prevention for Sustainable Development program, also known as the Global Wildlife Program. -
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