

Poaching: 369 arrests in nine months

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AT LEAST 369 alleged poachers have been arrested in the last nine months, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism says.

This comes at a time that elephant and rhino poaching has been on the decline over the last few years.

According to the latest statistics from the ministry, the Kunene, Kavango East and Zambezi regions topped the list of areas where the most suspects were arrested.

A total of 56 suspects were arrested in the Kunene region, 45 in the Kavango East, and 42 in the Zambezi region.

The Omusati and Khomas regions reported 36 and 35 arrests, respectively.

A total of 654 suspects were arrested last year, with 308 cases of wildlife crime registered.

Of those, 111 cases are related to high-value species.

“Of these cases, 100 are related to pangolin poaching and trafficking, 64 to elephant poaching and trafficking, while 113 are related to rhino poaching and trafficking,” ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda says.

The majority of the suspects, a total of 597, were Namibian, however, other Southern African Development Community

nationals were also among those arrested.

Over the last five years, elephant poaching has declined from 50 cases in 2017 to five thus far this year, while rhino poaching declined from 81 cases in 2018 to 14 this year.

Muyunda says the decline in poaching can be attributed to the strengthened measures put in place by the ministry in collaboration with key stakeholders.

“The additional measures include the creation of the dog unit, the revamping of the air wing by adding a helicopter, increasing aerial patrols, and the establishment of a dedicated anti-poaching unit,” he says.

He says their intelligence has also led to more arrests of perpetrators before poaching takes place.

Muyunda says members of the public have provided the ministry with leads to potential or actual incidents of poaching.

“Overall, the country is standing together against poaching. There is more to be done to get the numbers to zero and to maintain such low figures, considering the fact that poachers will be challenged to find innovative ways to counter our efforts,” he says.

Muyunda vows to stay ahead of poaching syndicates by anticipating their next moves.

“Poachers and those intending to poach should be warned that Namibia has taken a stand against poaching, and they will face the full wrath of law,” he says.

The ministry's success is further due to partnerships with stakeholders, which include the uniformed forces, non-governmental organisations, and the general public, he says.

LION POACHERS

Ministry officials last week discovered two carcasses of collared male lions at the Otjomapenda cattle post near Palmfontein in the Ehirovipuka conservancy.

Muyunda says the lions were buried with stones after they were poisoned.

“The ministry staff discovered that the lions' collars have stopped sending signals and responses, prompting them to conduct the search,” he says.

He says the operation has led to the gruesome discovery of the lion carcasses.

“A further search led to the discovery of four more lions and two hyenas on Saturday, 9 October, in the same area. A search operation in the area is ongoing to see if there are more carcasses. The number of killed lions may increase,” he says.

A man was arrested after he confessed to killing the lions.