



Cops turn to DNA analysis in wildlife crimes

2022-06-17 **Albertina Nakale**

Namibia will soon make use of DNA analysis in forensic investigations into animal abuse and crimes such as illegal smuggling, poaching and the illegal trade in protected species.

Using DNA analysis will make it possible to identify the species and geographical origin, such as the population of a forensic sample, and to also individualise the sample with high levels of probability.

Police chief Sebastian Ndeitunga this week announced that the capacitation of the new National Forensic Science Institute of Namibia is at an advanced stage.

The facility is to be realised with the assistance of wildlife funding partners in creating a wildlife or animal DNA database and analysis.

“With this in place, the Namibian Police will be having the capacity to forensically investigate and connect evidence collected at crime scenes involving wildlife,” he stated.

He made the comments during a stakeholders’ forum that aimed to discuss progress made, present the identified law-enforcement challenges, and collectively pave the way forward with regards to the implementation of the 2021-2025 revised National Strategy on Wildlife Protection and Law-Enforcement.

The ministry of environment has recorded an alarming number of rhino carcasses found in the Etosha National Park from the beginning of this month.

Eleven black rhinos have been poached in the last two weeks.

In total, 22 rhino carcasses were discovered as of January.

A total of 131 wildlife crime cases have been registered between 2017 and 14 June 2022, Namibian Police Force Deputy Commissioner for the Protected Resources Division, Barry de Klerk, has revealed.

Speaking at the same forum here on Wednesday, De Klerk revealed that 93 cases are ongoing at various courts in the country, while 16 have been finalised with convictions and nine have been provisionally withdrawn.

Eight cases were struck off the court rolls, whilst two were finalised without convictions, two were finalised, and one was declared indeterminate.

“Poaching remains rife in Namibia, and this calls for better collective strategies on wildlife crime and law- enforcement to preserve wildlife for future generations,” he stressed.

He noted that the suspects arrested include 487 Namibians, 21 Angolans, five Zambians and five Asians. A total of 243 suspects are out on bail while 132 are awaiting trial, and 32 suspects’ cases were withdrawn. Furthermore, 30 people were discharged and 29 were released. A total of 30 suspects have been convicted, nine are deceased, eight have absconded and five have been acquitted.

Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism Pohamba Shifeta said wildlife trafficking has become a multi-billion-dollar criminal enterprise that has expanded, and environmental crime has

exploded to become the fourth-largest criminal sector worldwide after drug trafficking, counterfeit crimes and human trafficking.

At the moment, Namibia makes use of South African forensic experts when the need arises.

The new facility will allow the police to properly secure evidence for court cases and investigations, and the rate at which such cases can be finalised will increase dramatically.

The database will help to identify new trafficking routes on the basis of DNA links from animal horns which were seized and matched to crime sites.

In other countries such as South Africa, a genetic database that holds DNA from thousands of African rhinoceroses has secured the convictions of poachers and led to stiffer criminal sentences since its establishment eight years ago, researchers say. However, not all scientists are convinced the effort is worthwhile.

- *Additional reporting by Nampa*

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