

Government probes workers for poaching

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by Charmaine Ngatjiheue



Pohamba Shifeta

THE Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism is investigating some of its workers at Etosha National Park for possibly playing a part in the rhino poaching syndicate which recently left 11 of the mammals dead.

Addressing the media yesterday environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said they suspect the “act” was an inside job. All the rhinos killed were also dehorned.

He said the ministry is broadening investigations to determine whether its workers were complicit in the matter.

“This is not a normal incident of 11 rhinos poached in such a short time frame, because rhinos do not move together. But the situation is under control given we have arrested some of the perpetrators, and we will continue to arrest more,” Shifeta said, adding his ministry has deployed the head of wildlife protection to ensure loopholes in the area are closed and no stone is left unturned.

He said investigations indicate the carcasses range from animals of three weeks and older.

The ministry also said 22 rhinos were poached in 2022 so far, compared to 43 in 2021, and 40 in 2020.

So far, two of the alleged poachers have been arrested, while three other suspects are still on the run.

Shifeta said there is a need to understand why the poachers chose the northern side of the park.

“This is an area that has been a hotspot before, and after increased security, we have noticed the poachers moved to the south in the past three or four years,” he said.

He said ministry investigations show the culprits may have been in the area for a number of days, and that the poaching was done over a number of days.

“It is not something normal. Etosha was secured over the past three or four years. We would want to investigate how long they have been there, because from what we saw, it shows they were there for a number of days,” Shifeta said.

Deputy police inspector general for operations Joseph Shikongo last week said they have observed a growing internationa

demand for wildlife and wildlife products.

This is despite the fact that the national strategy on wildlife protection and law enforcement has been revised.

He said in an effort to satisfy this demand, transnational criminal syndicates have created networks that facilitate the execution of poaching and related wildlife crimes.

"These networks make it so dynamic to combat such crimes, which involve the recruitment of locals for a minimal financial reward, by mostly foreign criminal syndicates," Shikongo said.

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