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Professional poaching gang targets white rhino

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POACHING GANG TARGETS WHITE RHINOS

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Last week, five white rhinos were poached on private farms, bringing 2022's total to 39, of which 15 were white rhinos.

According to a farmer from the Gobabis district, three white rhinos were poached on his farm since the end of July, two just last week.

The farmer, who is known to Namibian Sun, cannot be named to protect the rhinos from poachers.

Another white rhino was poached on a private farm in the Okavango district, while the carcasses of two more white rhinos – killed by poachers - were discovered on a private farm in the Outjo district.

The Gobabis farmer told Namibian Sun it seems that inside information is being provided to poachers on the rhinos' movements.

“One thing's is for sure – we are dealing with a very big, professional syndicate.”

While there are some clues they are following up on, he said they currently don't have a concrete lead on the suspects involved.

He added that he is in constant contact with the farmers from Okavango and Outjo so that they can compare crime scenes and information.

Professional gang

The farmer told Namibian Sun one thing they noticed is that the poachers used mattress pieces tied to their shoes to disguise their footprints.

He said this makes the footprint barely noticeable because it looks like the print of a rhino.

They also noticed that the poachers change shoes constantly, using both flip-flops and sneakers and backtracking over their footprints to cover them, he said.

“You can see that this is a very professional gang by the precise manner in which the horns were cut.”

Last year, 44 rhinos were poached in Namibia, while 2020 saw 42 poached. In 2019, 57 were poached, 83 in 2018 and 55 in 2017.

Downlisting proposed

Namibian Sun recently reported that Namibia wants to downlist its white rhino population in an effort to facilitate trade in live animals for in-situ conservation and trophy hunting.

This is but one of the proposals that will be heard at this year’s World Wildlife Conference, where stricter trade regulations for nearly 600 animals and plant species - believed to be under threat of extinction from international trade - will be considered.

The proposals have been put forward by the parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and will be reviewed at the meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 19) that will take place in Panama from 14 to 25 November.

In essence, the Namibian government wants to downgrade its white rhino population from CITES Appendix I to Appendix II. Appendix I contains the list of species threatened by extinction, while Appendix II is a list of species with looser protections.

Growth

“This is simply a downlisting proposal, with no consequential actions being implemented other than to facilitate trade in live animals for in-situ conservation, and legally hunted trophies which - in turn - will enhance the conservation of the species and its habitat,” government said.

Namibia’s white rhino population has grown from 16 animals in 1975 to the current national population of 1 237.

Most white rhinos in Namibia are privately owned, currently totalling 952 animals in around 85 populations, with large numbers imported from South Africa since 2012.

Government added that transferring the population to Appendix II will create access to a far larger market for white rhinos