



- [HOME](#)
- [ENVIRONMENT](#)
- DEHORNING TO PROTECT AGAINST POACHERS



Dehorning to protect rhinos

- [ENVIRONMENT](#)

DEHORNING TO PROTECT AGAINST POACHERS

Action against surge in poaching

Over the past six weeks, about 14 white rhinos have been killed by poachers, and, as a result, some rhino custodians have begun to dehorn all their animals to protect them.

Ellanie Smit

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Private rhino owners have begun dehorning their animals again to protect them against a recent surge in rhino poaching.

The number of rhinos poached this year has increased to 48, surpassing last year's total of 44, and the 42 rhinos poached in total in 2020.

Of the animals poached this year so far, 32 were black rhinos and 16 were white rhinos.

Twelve black rhinos were poached on custodianship farms and 16 white rhinos were poached on private farms.

Romeo Muyunda, spokesperson for the environment ministry, said after a thorough assessment in the Etosha National Park, three carcasses were discovered in June and recently confirmed as poached. Last week, he said two more carcasses were discovered the previous week.

He said this brings the total to 20 poached rhinos in Etosha.

Massacre

Two black rhino carcasses were recently discovered in the Otjozondjupa Region.

The two females were found at two different private game farms in the Otjituuu and Otjiwarongo areas. The names of these farms are not being disclosed to protect them from any further risk.

Otjozondjupa police inspector Maureen Mbeha said a pregnant black rhino was shot and killed in August on a game farm in the Otjiwarongo district.

She said the suspects hunted and killed the rhino with an unknown firearm and hacked off both horns with an unknown object.

Since it was pregnant, the rhino's value is estimated to have been N\$1 million.

No arrest has been made and investigations are ongoing.

In a separate incident, a black rhino was found poached on a private farm in the Grootfontein

district on 22 August.

Mbeha said the suspects also killed the female with an unknown firearm, and subsequently hacked off both horns.

The value of the rhino is estimated at N\$500 000, and no arrests have been made.

Protection

"We are facing this hurdle head-on to ensure that we effectively fight poaching. As was noted before, poaching has become more prevalent on private farms as well as black rhino custodianship farms. We are implementing new measures across the board to counter this surge," said Muyunda.

He said that anti-poaching units on private farms are being strengthened, and police and ministry law enforcement officials are being made available to assist private farmers with intelligence, law enforcement and patrols.

"We will also be offering the services of our helicopter for aerial patrols in hotspot areas."

Muyunda added that the ministry, together with stakeholders, will pull resources together to stop the poaching surge.

"However, while we do so, we urge members of the public to remain vigilant and report any suspected case of poaching and other wildlife crimes."

Dehorning

Jaco Muller, founder of Help our Rhino's Now (HoRn) and owner of a rhino-custodianship farm, told Namibian Sun that the past few weeks have been the worst with regards to rhino poaching, especially on private farms.

He said that over the past six weeks, about 14 white rhinos have been killed by poachers, and, as a result, they have started to dehorn all their animals to protect them.

"It is very sad for me. You never know if you will ever see rhinos with these horns. We had a rhino cow with a 34-inch horn that we had to cut off. I was nearly in tears, because it is such a magnificent animal and now you have to cut off that horn. But for the animal's sake, it is for the best."

In 2019 a total of 57 rhinos were poached, 83 in 2018 and 55 in 2017.

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