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NAMIBIA RECOMMITTS TO COMBATTING ELEPHANT POACHING

Poaching has been steadily declining

The elephant population in Namibia has increased over the years from an estimated 7 000 at independence to about 23 736, but the growing population has become a major cause of human-wildlife conflict.

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Namibia is part of seven southern African elephant range states that have strongly reconfirmed their commitment to combatting elephant poaching ahead of this year's World Wildlife Conference (Cop 19).

Representatives from these seven countries recently met in Maputo, Mozambique, for the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) sub-regional steering committee meeting. A programme of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), this was the first in-person MIKE meeting held in southern Africa in three years due to the pandemic.

The crucial conservation role southern Africa plays as a home to the majority of the African elephant population was highlighted at the meeting.

According to a CITES statement, representatives shared experiences of their day-to-day work with the MIKE programme at different focal sites, which included suggestions to increase law enforcement capacity to further combat poaching.

“They highlighted the importance of initiatives that cross national borders to coordinate the management of elephant populations, and the opportunities available for training rangers through the programme, including the upcoming training to be held this month at the Southern African Wildlife College for rangers from MIKE sites across southern Africa.”

It said the benefits of a new, online database for collating monitoring data collected under MIKE were also discussed. Data can now be entered in real time and used by protected area and national authorities to plan management approaches.

Human-elephant conflict

According to CITES, representatives also noted increased incidences of human-elephant conflicts in and around many protected areas. Elephants seeking food on land occupied by local communities has led to clashes, which have resulted in people being injured, or in some cases, killed.

One of the recommendations for follow-up action that emerged from the meeting was for range states, with the support of the MIKE central coordination unit, to identify funding opportunities

to address such conflicts.

A total of 16 recommendations were identified for further action. These included sharing best practices and lessons learned from implementation in focal sites of the MIKE programme, as well as to engage with range states on possible collaboration with ranger training institutions in their respective countries, among other actions.

The elephant population in Namibia has increased over the years from an estimated 7 000 at independence to about 23 736. However, the increasing population has become a major cause of human-wildlife conflict in the country.

Meanwhile, elephant poaching has been steadily declining over the last five years, from 50 elephants poached in 2017 to 27 in 2018, 13 in 2019, 12 in 2020 and eight in 2021.