

Owners to lose cars over wildlife crimes

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Martha Imalwa

THE owners of two cars that were used to transport pangolin skins are set to lose their vehicles to the state, following an order given in the Windhoek High Court yesterday.

In terms of an order given by judge Shafimana Ueitele, a Nissan NP200 bakkie and Nissan Tiida sedan seized by the police in the Grootfontein district four years ago have now been declared forfeited to the state.

Ueitele's order also authorises the police to sell the two cars at a public auction, with the proceeds of the sale to be paid into a Prevention of Organised Crime Act asset recovery account of the Ministry of Justice.

The two cars were impounded by the police after six people were arrested at the John Pandeni agricultural research station in the Grootfontein district on 3 August 2018 and subsequently charged with wildlife crimes.

In an affidavit filed at the High Court, prosecutor general Martha Imalwa recounts that the six people were arrested after the police had received information that there were people at the research station who were in possession of protected wildlife products.

Police officers who visited the research station found a live scaly anteater (pangolin) and two pangolin skins in a container at a house to which an informer directed them, Imalwa says in her statement.

A python skin was also found on a boundary wall at the same premises.

Imalwa adds that the police officers were told that one of the men at the house, Asser Nangolo, had transported the live pangolin and skins to the house in a Nissan Tiida, which was also at the scene. The car is registered in the name of Nangolo's wife.

While the police were still at the house, a Nissan NP200 pickup arrived, Imalwa says. In that vehicle, the police found four pangolin skins.

The two occupants of the bakkie, including its owner, Joel Kaulikufwa, were arrested, and, like the Nissan Tiida, the pickup was impounded by the police as well, Imalwa relates.

She states that the two vehicles facilitated the commission of offences or were used to commit offences, namely the possession of or dealing in controlled wildlife products, the illegal hunting of protected wildlife and the acquisition or possession of the proceeds of unlawful activities.

In terms of the Prevention of Organised Crime Act, property involved in the commission of an offence is defined as an instrumentality of an offence.

The act also states that the High Court must order the forfeiture of property to the state if it is shown that the property is, on a balance of probabilities, an instrumentality of offences listed in the act or is the proceeds of unlawful activities.

Also filed with the court is a statement in which an officer attached to the police's Protected Resources Division states that, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, pangolins are the most trafficked mammals globally, despite an international ban on trade in all pangolin species since January 2017.

Figures on the confiscation of live scaly anteaters and pangolin skins indicate that in Namibia, too, poaching of the species and dealing in pangolins are rife and are a threat to the survival of the species in the country, the officer states.

Lawyer Chynna Piccanin represented the prosecutor general in the court proceedings before Ueitele yesterday.

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