



Namibian Authorities Concerned About Increase in Rhino Poaching

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FILE - A black rhino is pictured on May 8, 2015, at Etosha National Park in northwestern Namibia.

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Namibian authorities say poachers killed 87 rhinos last year, almost double the number killed in 2021 in a country that is home to the world's largest free roaming black rhino population. Conservationists say poachers seeking rhino horns for Asian markets are targeting Namibia's commercial farms.

Simson Uri-Khob, chief executive officer of the Save the Rhino Trust, told VOA there have been almost no incidents of rhino poaching in Namibia's rhino conservancies for the past 30 months.

He said, however, that poaching is a major concern in the more than 2-million-hectare Etosha National Park and on commercial farms where rhinos serve as tourist attractions. He said the last poaching on the communal land in the conservancies was in 2020 during the pandemic lockdown.

“That was the last poaching we had in our conservancy, but poaching is still happening in Etosha and on private land that is where the poachers are targeting now,” Uri-Khob said.

Last week, a parliamentary committee on natural resources held a meeting with various stakeholders in the tourism and conservation sectors to discuss the increase in poaching.

The director of wildlife and parks at the Ministry of Environment, Bennett Kahuure, said poachers target the national park because of its size, which makes it hard to protect.

“Different syndicates operate in the country targeting rhinos wherever they exist and given a small chance, they will strike and they will strike again,” Kahuure said.

Ministry of Environment spokesman Romeo Muyunda said although incidents of elephant poaching have drastically declined over the years, poaching of rhinos remains a major concern.

“The ministry has expressed its concern considering the fact that we have recorded 87 rhinos poached in 2022,” Muyunda said. “This is obviously one of the highest numbers but not the highest number of poaching we have recorded. We have had 43 rhinos recorded in 2020 as well as 45 rhinos in 2021 and 84 rhinos in 2018 and so far, this year only one rhino has been poached.”

Poaching has reduced rhino numbers throughout Africa in recent decades and the animal is now considered a critically endangered species.

Namibia has an estimated 800 white rhinos and 1,800 black rhinos.

Muyunda said the country has implemented measures in the national park to combat poachers but declined to give further details so as not to undermine the additional security.