

I can't guarantee you will leave Etosha alive'

News - National | 2023-03-30

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Naftal Sakaria

OSHANA police commissioner Naftal Sakaria says armed poachers found in the Etosha National Park should surrender to the police or they will be shot.

Police inspector general Joseph Shikongo last week appointed Sakaria as the commander of the anti-poaching unit in Etosha National Park for a period of six months.

While in this position, he will also remain the Oshana regional commander.

Sakaria is tasked with commanding the police and military forces deployed in the flagship park to protect animals, especially iconic animals such as elephants and rhinos, from being poached.

"I will not have a situation where police officers are shot and killed in Etosha by poachers. If a poacher has an intention of going into Etosha, armed to poach and comes across the police, they better surrender immediately. Otherwise, we are not going to guarantee their safety or their return from Etosha. That must be clear," he says.

Sakaria says not so long ago a police officer was shot in Etosha National Park by poachers.

He urged the public to report wildlife crimes to the police, with a reward of up to N\$50 000 for information that leads to an arrest or the recovery of wildlife products.

Members of the public can also notify the police about wildlife crime by sending a text message to 55555.

"If you give us information that can prevent poaching from taking place or after it has taken place or that leads to recovery of the poached ivory or rhino horns, then you can get up to N\$50 000," he says.

"We can no longer afford to lose rhinos. So, we are reinforced in terms of manpower.

As the commander, I have deployed units to Etosha. I will be going with my Special Reserve Force from Oshana whenever there are tracks spotted or information, so we can try to intercept."

According to a statement released by the ministry's spokesperson, Romeo Muyunda, at end of January, 87 rhinos were poached last year, 61 of them black rhinos and 26 white rhinos.

"The 2022 poaching cases include 15 rhinos poached on rhino custodianship farms, another 25 on white rhino private farms and 46 in Etosha National Park.

"In previous years, Namibia has recorded 45 rhinos poached in 2021, 43 in 2020, 61 in 2019, 84 in 2018 and 55 in 2017. This year, one rhino has been poached."

Muyunda says no elephants have been poached so far this year. Elephant poaching figures have declined steeply over the past years, from the highest figure of 101 in 2015, 50 in 2017, 27 in 2018, 13 in 2019, 12 in 2020, 10 in 2021, to four elephants poached last year, comprising two in the Zambezi region and one each in Kavango West and Kunene, he says.

The ministry has noted with serious concern that Etosha National Park is a poaching hotspot.

Last year environment minister Pohamba Shifeta said the ministry was investigating some of its workers at the Etosha National Park for possibly playing a part in the rhino poaching syndicate which left 11 of the mammals dead at the time.

Shifeta at the time said they suspect the "act" was an inside job. All the rhinos killed were dehorned.



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