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The same syndicates that in Southern Africa are involved in the illegal trade of, for example, gems, gold, drugs and stolen transit cash as well as abalone, are apparently also involved in wildlife crimes and the smuggling of, among other things, turtles, maggots, rhinoceros horns and ivory. PHOTO PIXABAY

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SMUGGLING GAME PRODUCTS ALONG WITH OTHER ITEMS

Syndicates diversify illegal activities

The same syndicates that are involved in the illegal trade of precious stones, drugs and stolen transit cash in Southern Africa are apparently also involved in wildlife crimes.

Elvira Hattingh

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Law enforcers in Namibia, as well as in Mozambique and Zambia are starting to pay more and more attention to the illegal smuggling of, among other things, abalone through their countries.

This is because there is growing evidence that the same companies and individuals involved in this smuggling are also involved in the export of illegal game products and other illegal activities.

On the contrary, growing evidence points to a confluence of other forms of crime with illegal wildlife trade.

The same syndicates that in Southern Africa are involved in the illegal trade of precious stones, gold, drugs and stolen transit cash as well as abalone are apparently also involved in wildlife crimes and the smuggling of turtles, maggots, rhinoceros horns and ivory, among other things.

This according to a research article by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) on the convergence of wildlife crime as well as other forms of transnational organized crime in East and Southern Africa.

The article by Alastair Nelson was released last week. Nelson is a senior analyst at the GI-TOC and is considered an expert in wildlife crime, corruption and organized crime and has been involved in combating wildlife crime in East and Southern Africa as well as in the Horn for more than 30 years. of Africa.

POACHERS NOT HARD

Nelson says that as far as Namibia is concerned, he has conducted in-depth interviews with the Blue Rhino task force as well as the Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Tourism's forestry and fisheries directorate.

According to the report, it rarely happens that a confluence of crime already occurs during the poaching of game.

"This means most poachers are not hardened criminals involved in various types of organized

crime. However, this is with the exception of rhino poaching in South Africa and southern Mozambique.

“There is growing evidence that hardened rhino poachers are also involved in transit robberies, blowing up ATMs and leasing firearms to crime groups.

"Evidence has also been found that corruption and money laundering are fundamental to organized crime. Therefore, investigations and measures should form an integral part of crime investigations.

"The identification of corruption, as well as corrupt facilitators, from the center where illegal products are smuggled, offers an opportunity to better understand other forms of crime, crime networks as well as methods," said Nelson.

LOW RISK

He says wildlife crimes are generally a low risk for syndicates and the punishment for them is lighter compared to other forms of serious crime.

"Some crime networks first 'test' smuggling routes and methods with wildlife products, before using them to smuggle other illegal products.

"However, criminal networks involved in the wildlife industry are becoming more and more sophisticated and are using more sophisticated methods to get their hands on products.

"High value wildlife products have become just another valuable commodity that organized crime networks acquire and smuggle."

Nelson says international syndicates are diversifying into wildlife products because it can increase their profits, spread their risks, reduce operational costs, adjust quickly depending on demand or if law enforcement raids, while also increasing their income.

Nelson completed the research for his latest article between January 2021 and August 2022.

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