

# Republikein

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# ELEPHANT POACHING LOWEST SINCE 2016

National security forces a 'deterrent'

**Statistics show that last year 55 elephant tusks were seized, 64 suspects were arrested in connection with elephant poaching and eight suspects were found guilty.**

**Yandy Du Plessis**

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Ellanie Smit - Last year, elephant poaching figures in Namibia were the lowest since 2016.

However, convictions are still far behind arrests made in poaching cases.

According to the report on wildlife protection and law enforcement in Namibia, only four elephants were poached in 2022 compared to 101 in 2016.

The following year, poaching incidents decreased to 50, while 27 elephants were poached in 2018, 13 in 2019, 12 in 2020 and eight in 2021.

Statistics further show that last year 55 elephant tusks were seized, 64 suspects were arrested in connection with elephant poaching and eight suspects were found guilty.

According to the report, the 34 elephant cases reported last year accounted for less than 10% of all registered wildlife crime cases - which totaled 430.

"The presence of national security forces in important elephant areas remains a deterrent to poachers."

After poaching peaked in 2016, losses have been limited to low levels currently considered to have little impact on the population, although it is important to ensure regular and accurate monitoring to assess population health, the report said.

## BACKGROUND

"Seizures of elephant tusks in Namibia have also fallen to their lowest levels since 2016, with much of the ivory still being seized believed to have come from outside the country."

However, annual arrests versus the current rate of convictions indicate that convictions in elephant cases still lag far behind arrests, as some cases from 2015 are still ongoing.

"An increase in arrests in 2019 and 2021 has increased the backlog and put pressure on the judiciary, while arrests in recent years have been – in most cases – related to ivory seizures. Few arrests have been related to poaching incidents in the past four years."

The report said the time between arrest and the completion of the case varied significantly for elephant cases, with some cases completed in 2020, 2021 and 2022 - after five years or more.

The number of elephant tusks seized per case registered dropped from an average of 2.5 in 2018 to 1.6 in 2022. At the same time, the average number of suspects arrested per case also fell to 1.6 from a peak of 2.4 in 2019, the statement said.

"It appears that fewer teeth are smuggled by fewer suspects."

## ELEPHANT POPULATION

Meanwhile, the elephant population of around 24,000 can be divided into four interconnected sub-populations, which have different vulnerabilities.

The report noted that the largest subpopulation of about 15,000 animals occurs in Kavango East and Zambezi Region, which straddles the core of the Kavango-Zambezi Transboundary Conservation Area (Kaza).

This cross-border population spends some of its time in neighboring countries.

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