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Illegal wire snares are decimating wildlife in Etosha



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Niël Terblanché

People that have settled in communities in various areas of the Etosha National Park, one of Namibia's premier tourist attractions are decimating wildlife by using wire snares to kill animals for food.

Romeo Muyunda, the spokesperson of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism said in a statement that the government institution is concerned over the increasing use of snares to illegally hunt and kill wild animals in the park.

The ministry expressed its concern after visitors to the park recently spotted several animals with snares around their necks. The incidents were reported causing to the ministry.

Muyunda said a report of a female springbok in a wire snare was received on 17 August 2023. He said the incident was attended to immediately by veterinary officials.

He said the springbok was immobilised by a tranquiliser dart and carefully examined by the veterinary official. It was observed that the wire has cut deep into tissue affecting vital life functions and the animal had to be euthanised.

“We wish to stress that snare removal is one of our day-to-day duties as part of park management. It is suspected that snares are being set up by some community members that reside within the National Park with the intention to hunt and kill game animals for meat. There are approximately 400 community members within the Etosha National Park,” Muyunda said.

According to Muyunda, the practice of ensnaring wild animals is not by any means sanctioned by the environment ministry. The practice is illegal and punishable by law.

He said that the ministry has since June 2023 commissioned a joint operation in collaboration with the Namibian Police and the Namibian Defence Force around Okakuejo to search and remove the snares in the park.

“In a period of three days, a total of 62 active wire snares were retrieved in the area around Okakuejo. Fresh Human footprints were also observed leading up to the settlement while a combined investigation of suspected residents was also instituted at Okakuejo,” he said.

According to Muyunda, four community engagement meetings were conducted by the joint team of Nampol, MEFT and NDF.

“The communities were educated and reminded of the rules and regulations of the park as well as penalties for contravention as per the provisions of the law,” he said.

Muyunda added that a snare removal exercise is ongoing in all of Namibia’s national parks.

He called on all tourists or visitors to the parks that may come across active wire snares, traps or any other illegal activity to report to the Ministry’s officials for swift action.

“We want to warn and send a firm caution to those involved in this very illicit activity to stop or face the risk of being caught and charged with illegal hunting of game. The Etosha National Park is our flagship park. Such incidences tarnish the park’s reputation,” he said.

Muyunda added that if investigations establish that any of the officials at the park are involved that they will be dealt with in the most severe disciplinary manner.