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Informanté

Shifeta introduces horse patrols to combat rhino poaching

Total of 39 rhinos poached this year

Staff Reporter

AS the world commemorates World Rhino Day, the Minister of Environment, Forestry, and Tourism, Pohamba Shifeta, today launched horse patrols to combat poaching against the endangered species.

Shifeta said that Namibia still experiences illegal hunting of rhinos as well as illegal trade in rhino horns. "The greatest threat to the rhino population is illegal hunting. This year, (39) rhinos have been poached in Namibia, compared to (92) in 2022, (50) in 2021, (47) in 2020, and (61) in 2019," Shifeta said. He further shared that the use of a combination of a horse unit, Dog Unit, Airwing or helicopter, and fixed-wing patrols, foot patrols, CCTV, intelligence gathering, and drones will help the ministry improve and do more to protect rhinos from illegal activities.





The black rhino has been listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species since 1996. It is also listed on Appendix I of CITES and classified as Endangered under the United States Endangered Species Act of 1973. Under Namibian legislation, the Nature Conservation Ordinance, 1975 (Ord. 4 of 1975), black rhino is listed as specially protected game, and its parts as a "controlled wildlife product" under the Controlled Wildlife Products and Trade Act, 2008 (Act No. 9 of 2008).

Shifeta said that Namibia is the stronghold of one of the three remaining populations of black rhinos in Southern Africa. This population is presumed to have ranged historically from southwestern Angola, through Namibia to the western part of South Africa. The Namibian metapopulation is thus classified taxonomically as *Diceros bicornis bicornis*.

He further explained that all black rhinos in Namibia remain the property of the State, and those occurring on private land, as well as some communal conservancies, have been placed there under the black rhino custodianship program, and in some conservancies, black rhino occurred naturally.

"Although all black rhinoceroses in Namibia remain state-owned, the program enables conservancies and private landowners with land to apply for custodianship of black rhinoceros. The strategic black rhinoceros translocations that have been carried out under the umbrella of the Black Rhinoceros Custodianship Programme since 1993 have not only realized the vision of expanding the range and establishing viable breeding populations of black rhinoceros but also contributed to the stimulation of high-density populations in National Parks, from which most of the animals have been sourced for the Custodianship Programme," Shifeta said.

On the other hand, the minister said that White rhinos in Namibia occur in both private and public ownership, on freehold and government land, respectively. Shifeta noted that Namibia has the second-largest white rhino population in the world after South Africa. "The species had become totally extinct, and all current populations thus originate from animals imported and introduced. Presently, white rhino management activities in Protected Areas such as Etosha National Park and Waterberg Plateau Park are closely linked to that of the black rhino management," the environment minister noted.

He, however, added that while the status of the white rhino populations in protected areas is well recorded, information about the white rhinos on private land is less tightly controlled. "Permitting requirements apply to imports and exports, sales and translocations, as well as to trophy hunting and possession of products. The new White Rhino Management Plan will help in tightening the regulations and management of white rhinos in Namibia. The Rhino Management Plans will serve as a tool and help us to conserve and sustainably manage a growing free-ranging population of both black and white rhinos of the subspecies *Diceros bicornis bicornis* and *Ceratotherium simum simum* within Namibia," Shifeta concluded.