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Eiseb and Kharugab had illegally shot two kudu, two gemsbok and a waterbuck. Photo: Private

POACHERS REPEATEDLY CHARGED

Serious repeat offenders do not stay in prison

After an anti-poaching unit caught two poachers, it turns out that these apparent habitual criminals have to answer in court for numerous poaching cases or even attempted

murder. Prosecutors seem to pay little attention to the serious allegations, so the defendants often get away scot-free.

Irene-Mari van der Walt, Frank Steffen

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By IM. van der Walt & F Steffen, Windhoek

After two habitual criminals and poachers were caught in the Okahandja area last Friday, it initially looked as if the men would not be able to appear in court in the town of Seeis. To the general displeasure of the local farmers, this was because the public prosecutor apparently had no transport from Windhoek to Seeis. According to a member of the Nossob Crime Prevention Group (NCPG), a farmer ultimately stepped in and brought the officer to Seeis.

“It's the same thing over and over again,” said another farmer from this area in an interview with AZ: “These poachers keep appearing in court and because the public prosecutor is not present, these cases are not being pursued any further.” The Windhoek lawyer, Milton Engelbrecht said yesterday that a defendant must appear in court within 48 hours of his or her arrest, excluding weekends. If this does not happen, the lawsuit against the accused must be discontinued.

This time things turned out differently in the case of the two suspects Ashley Eiseb and Hermanus Kharugab. They were charged with illegal hunting, among other charges. The aforementioned NCPG member explained that many poachers prefer to hunt game rather than slaughter livestock because the punishment is lower.

“Eiseb is a big problem,” explained the NCPG man. “We already know most of the people we catch from previous cases - they are always the same people.” Meanwhile, another suspected poacher was caught on Monday. “This is a guy who has been on our minds for a long time. “He was already locked up in Seeis once because we caught him with a stolen 5,000 liter tank and there were hunted gemsbok in the back of the truck,” says the informant. Accordingly, the anti-poaching unit had been notified of six poachers who appeared to be up to mischief between Friday and Sunday.

“We know quite a few of the poachers and have memorized their faces because they get a simple fine when they admit their guilt and everyone is happy that the case is over! So they are quickly released again because it is not checked whether there are previous lawsuits or judgments against them.”

The presence in the courtroom as well as a protest from the farmers affected by poaching ensured that finally they too plaintiffs would be taken into account. The Justice Department has been asked to comment on allegations that the negligence or absence of prosecutors is leading to trials being dropped. There was no response at the time of going to press.

The Kharugab case is interesting because the man had already been charged with attempted murder and poaching - he shot at his pursuers in December 2022 when they caught him with a kudu carcass. Due to his new arrest, that court date was postponed until next Friday. The situation is similar for Eiseb, who has to answer in court for various poaching complaints in

Witvlei, Gobabis, Windhoek and Omaruru. No one could provide any information as to why these men were still at large.

The two men were arrested at 4am last Friday morning after renting a car and were later found to be in illegal possession of five carcasses - two kudu, two gemsbok and one waterbuck - with a total value of 35,000 Namibian dollars. The animals were hunted along the gravel roads from Kapps Farm to Midgard and on to Okahandja. The car rental company had observed the car via the tachograph and alerted the police because the car was not going to Kamanjab as previously stated.