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The PCRF releases a pangolin that survived illegal smuggling and was confiscated. Photos: Kelsey Prediger, PCRF

- **ENVIRONMENT**

PANGOLIN CONCERN

Recently, more pangolins were poached than rhinos and elephants combined

The Ministry of the Environment has arrested more pangolin poachers in recent months. But that's no reason to be happy: more and more pangolins are being poached in Namibia.

Katharina Moser

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By Katharina Moser, Windhoek

The Namibian Ministry of the Environment is concerned about an acute increase in pangolin poaching in Namibia in recent months. “The Ministry is pleased to observe that more suspects were arrested in connection with pangolin trafficking between September 1 and November 30, 2023. However, we are concerned that this could also indicate an increase in crimes against pangolins,” said Romeo Muyunda, spokesman for the ministry, in a statement.

A total of 18 hides, 12 live animals and 146 scales were seized during the period, resulting in 23 cases registered and 38 suspects arrested. “These numbers exceed the numbers for elephants and rhinos combined during this period.” These cases are predominantly from the northern regions, particularly Kavango West (six cases), followed by the Kavango East, Ohangwena, Oshana and Zambezi regions with three each registered cases. A total of four cases were recorded in the central regions and only one case was reported in the Kunene region.

However, from January to August 2023, only six live animals were found and 19 furs were confiscated, according to the Environment Ministry. The recent increase represents a worrying trend. For the whole year, the total number of animals poached this year (live animals, skins and scales) is 50, plus two fetuses that were aborted from confiscated live female pangolins.

The Pangolin Conservation and Research Foundation (PCRF), which is committed to the conservation and research of pangolins in Namibia, told AZ that the recent increase in poaching is also a seasonal phenomenon: In Namibia, poaching peaks in May. Often high temperatures until November due to the dryness. Animals are easier to find these days.

Pangolins confiscated alive by authorities are often in very poor health. According to Kelsey Prediger, founder and director of the PCRF, the chances of survival after release are significantly higher for these animals if they have previously received veterinary treatment and, ideally, been rehabilitated. The PCRF has set itself the goal for 2024 of having every pangolin confiscated

alive treated by a veterinarian and fitted with a radio collar before it is released into the wild.

Pangolins, also known as pangolins, are extremely rare and extremely endangered. In Namibia, smuggling it is a serious offense: possession of a pangolin or its parts carries the same maximum penalty as nose horn, namely up to 15 years in prison and a fine of up to N\$15,000,000. Trading or selling pangolins is punishable by up to 25 years in prison and a fine of N\$25,000,000.

The public can anonymously report information about wildlife crimes to the authorities on the hotline 55 555.