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Inheemse plante wat gestroop en waarop beslag gelê is, kry nou nuwe lewe kry by die Nasionale Botaniese Tuin in Windhoek. Foto Augetto Graig



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'n *Adenia pechuelii*-plant wat in stropers se besit gevind is. Foto Augetto Graig



Die nasionale botaniese tuine se kurator, Leevi Nanyeni versoek Namibiërs om hul deel te doen om die land se inheemse plante te beskerm. Foto Augetto Graig



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PLANT POACHING A RISING TREND

Sleepless nights for officials battling botanical poachers

Many of the targeted Namibian plant species are vulnerable to extinction.

Augetto Graig

- 11 HOURS AGO - 2023-12-07 00:05:00

National Botanical Garden curator Leevi Nanyeni has called on Namibians to support the fight against the growing trend of poaching of vulnerable and indigenous plants.

Namibia is home to some of the world's most unique plant species, all categorised, catalogued and preserved at the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) in the capital.

"These days, we are increasingly dealing with plant poaching," Nanyeni said.

"Plant poaching has become a tendency. I am already aware of up to ten registered cases of it – just between 2019 and 2023. The plants are removed, and there are many cases, such as with *Adenia pechuelii*, where the plants can grow to a massive size. I have one case involving 164 of these plants," he said.

"Our precious plants are targeted, and many are being extracted. Perhaps they can be used for bonsais because they are so beautiful, but that's just a theory; we're not sure. It's something that gives me sleepless nights. Those caught for this [poaching] should be exposed publicly on radio and television so that we can know who they are," Nanyeni said.

He said at the botanical garden, "we rehabilitate what we receive, or we find a suitable and secure place to plant them and take care of them."

Many of the targeted plant species are vulnerable to extinction.

Vulnerable plants

The environment and forestry ministry expressed similar concerns about this trend in August.

Ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda at the time said there is an increasing number of confiscated poached plants – with 22 arrests in this regard since 2022.

"It is clear that plant products are being illegally harvested and traded in large volumes, which can have a rapid impact on plant populations, especially those of rare species with a localised distribution," he said.

Global demand growing

A 2022 report on wildlife protection and law enforcement in Namibia noted an incident where *Cyphostemma* and *Adenia* specimens, with forged permits, were smuggled by airfreight from Windhoek to Hong Kong.

The report highlighted the challenge of illegal harvests being concealed among legal ones.

"The global demand for ornamental plants has exploded in recent years, partly driven by the internet, which facilitates easy connections to markets worldwide, while the risk of being apprehended is low," the report warned.

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