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HUNDREDS BEHIND BARS FOR RHINO POACHING

Ellanie Smit

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A total of 707 suspects have been arrested in connection with rhino poaching between January 2023 and March of this year.

Currently, 589 suspects are in custody awaiting trial, 91 suspects have been convicted, 21 are out on bail, five have been released, two were acquitted, and one suspect has died.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta provided these statistics during his budget motivation for the 2024–2025 financial year.

The minister warned that the country has recently experienced "a high rate of criminal syndicates targeting our rhinos."

He highlighted that the anti-poaching unit has achieved a breakthrough on the poaching incidences in Etosha and private farms, where 28 rhinos have been poached this year.

Fourteen suspects have been arrested in connection with recent cases. Premier League: Arsenal 0 vs 2 Aston Villa | West Han

Protection activities

The anti-poaching activities fall under the ministry's programme for the protection and management of key species and natural habitats, for which N\$49 million has been allocated for the 2024/2025 financial year.

The programme involves monitoring and research to guide the sustainable conservation and management of species of high conservation value.

A number of activities were implemented under the programme during the 2023/2024 financial year.

This included the dehorning of 700 rhinos to minimise poaching in Namibia.

Moreover, game counts in the north-central and southern conservancies were conducted. A rhino block count was also conducted in Etosha National Park.

Furthermore, aerial surveys were conducted in Mangetti Game Park, Waterberg Plateau Park, Nyae-Nyae Buffalo Camp and Hardap Game Park.

The ministry also conducted the north-west elephant survey and a wetland survey.

Etosha fences and roads

In addition, Shifeta said N\$69.8 million was allocated to the infrastructure and development, maintenance, monitoring and evaluation programme.

The programme covers the repair and upgrade of fencing in protected areas as well as the construction and renovation of staff houses and offices.

During the previous financial year, the ministry upgraded and electrified 98 km of the Etosha National Park fence and 36 km of the road between Okaukuejo and Olifantus.

"The Etosha National Park fencing project currently employs 30 members of conservancies from around the park and 10 youths from the National Youth Service," said Shifeta.

He added that the ministry graded 2 921 km of roads and cut lines in protected areas during the period under review.

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