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POLICING ALONE NOT ENOUGH TO STOP WILDLIFE CRIME – REPORT

Hunger often a motivation for poaching

The report highlights that current law-enforcement approaches tend to focus only on arrests, irrespective of the circumstances of a particular case.

Ellanie Smit

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The ongoing high rates of wildlife crime in Namibia and its expansion into new sectors, despite active law enforcement efforts, are clear signs that rigorous crime fighting alone will not reduce these activities.

This is according to the Namibia National Report on Wildlife Protection for 2023, which warned that while law enforcement is vital, particularly in combatting organised criminal activities, further initiatives should be employed to

reduce wildlife crimes.

The report noted that this includes addressing socio-economic factors, such as poverty, which is often linked to subsistence poaching and other crimes.

It also emphasised that communities should gain tangible legal benefits from wildlife.

‘No criminal intent’

Other issues to focus on include fostering community pride and vigilance, security infrastructure, active crime deterrence, appropriate sentences, increased awareness of key issues, handling of cases according to conditions and needs, judiciary awareness, dismantling of demand chains and transnational investigations with neighbouring and destination countries.

The report highlighted that current law-enforcement approaches tend to focus only on arrests, irrespective of the circumstances of a particular case or the seriousness of a particular transgression.

“Yet many transgressions include no criminal intent and should not be categorised as serious wildlife crimes.”

Active awareness creation is vital in addressing some issues, while periods of amnesty to register or hand in controlled wildlife products can resolve some infringements, the report stated.

Understanding motivations

It suggested that revisions to applicable legislation could be required, especially in the classification of some activities.

These can include inadvertent transgressions, cultural items or family keepsakes such as skins or skulls of protected species kept without permits, and illegal wildlife products collected as personal decorative mementos such as whale bones, porcupine quills and ostrich eggs.

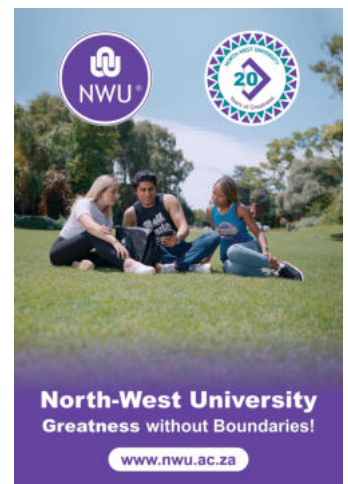
Others can include species such as tortoises, kept as personal pets without permits, defending life and livelihoods during human-wildlife conflict, and avenging or preempting loss of livestock, crops or other damage by killing wildlife and poaching for survival.

"Poor people poach directly for their own consumption; subsistence poaching is as much a socio-economic issue as it is a wildlife transgression and requires parallel mitigating approaches," the report stressed.

Another transgression category could include negligent permit compliance.

“People with legal access to wildlife may exhibit permit negligence without criminal intent. In many instances, the above categories can and should be handled without criminal charges.”

Wildlife (/search?query=Wildlife)



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