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ENVIRONMENT (/ENVIRONMENT)

SPIKE IN PANGOLIN POACHING

Ellanie Smit

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Pangolins continue to rank second behind rhinos among the wildlife most targeted by poachers in Namibia in terms of the number of cases registered in 2023.

Last year, 60 wildlife crime cases were registered for pangolins and 90 cases for rhinos. In 2022, 36 pangolin cases were registered. (BSE) DCI 9622.52 Same 0 | NSX: MTC 7.75 SAME | Anirep 8.99 SAME | Capricorn Investment group 17.:

In 2023, Namibian authorities confiscated 17 live pangolins, 53 pangolin skins and 905 scales, which led to the arrest of 106 suspects.

This is according to Namibia's National Wildlife Protection Report for 2023.

After a significant drop in cases during 2022, which was largely attributed to the stern deterrent sentences delivered by the special wildlife crime courts during that year, pangolin seizures have again increased dramatically in 2023, the report noted.

It said DNA sampling of pangolin shipments seized in Asia has thus far shown that the majority originate from western and central Africa, while extensive DNA sampling has even led to the discovery of a new pangolin species in Asia.

Pangolins from Namibia have not been clearly identified within markets or along trade routes.

More data needed

The report said urgent research is needed to better understand the dynamics of the pangolin trade in Namibia and what markets poached animals are intended for.

"This will enable a more targeted, proactive approach to countering pangolin poaching than simply arresting poachers or traffickers."

Currently, nearly all pangolin seizures are achieved either directly through arrests of suspects offering pangolin products for sale or as one component of seizures of various wildlife products during targeted operations.

In sharp contrast to the rhino-horn trade, no trade routes out of Namibia have been identified for pangolin.

According to the report, it has been suggested that the driest months are most conducive to pangolin poaching – and seizures may be highest at this time.

It further said pangolin poaching is believed to be mostly opportunistic.

"It has become common knowledge that pangolins are valuable, and some soliciting of pangolin products is likely to also take place. Yet there are currently no indications of specialist pangolin hunters in Namibia, although such specialisation has been reported from other countries."

Rescue and release efforts

The report said some pangolins continue to be trafficked alive, presenting an opportunity to save the poached animals.

In 2019, live pangolins made up more than a third of all seizures, while in 2023, this was less than a quarter.

It said important progress has been achieved in pangolin rehabilitation and release after seizures.

Post-release monitoring has highlighted the complexity of pangolin rehabilitation, as well as the dangers of 'hard releases' (immediate release without rehabilitation).

Based on this work, improved rehabilitation and release protocols have reduced mortalities, with carefully rehabilitated animals having the highest survival rates, according to the report.

The distribution and density of pangolins in Namibia continue to be based largely on anecdotal and incidental evidence. It is suspected that pangolin numbers in many small-stock farming areas of southern Namibia have been drastically reduced by electric fences installed in recent decades to keep out jackals and caracals.