

HOME CRIME HABITUAL CRIMINALS FEED POACHING CRISIS



A total of 726 rhinos were poached between 2015 and 2024. Photo archive

CRIME

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Statistics show that repeat arrests in rhino-related crimes sometimes account for more than 50% of total arrests.

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Only about 7% of all suspects arrested for rhino-related crimes in Namibia in the past decade have been convicted by the end of 2024.

Since 2015 when the current rhino poaching crisis first peaked, 726 rhinos have been recorded as poached in Namibia by last year.

According to the Namibia National Wildlife Protection Report for 2024, proactive law enforcement led to the arrest of 855 suspects accused of rhino-related crimes.

However, the report from the Ministry of the Environment, Forestry and Tourism, Namibian Police and Office of the Prosecutor General points out that the lack of serious consequences for such offences remains a major challenge for rhino conservation and protection in Namibia.

"A large number of suspects arrested are known habitual offenders, experienced criminals with previous arrests related to rhino-related crimes, released on bail in ongoing court cases, or released after being tried," the report said.

SLIPPING THROUGH THE CRACKS

Statistics show that repeat arrests in rhino-related crimes sometimes account for more than 50% of total arrests.

"Some suspects have been arrested up to eight times over the past ten years, but in most cases, none of their cases have been settled."

The warns that many of the arrests are still involved in suspected criminal activity.

"It is not uncommon for them to flee while on bail and some leave the country to evade justice."

The report recommends that "bail applications should be refused as a precautionary measure when there is a risk that suspects are habitual offenders and all means should be used to expedite the finalisation of the case."

It further highlights recidivism – a criminal term for a convicted felon's tendency to commit offences again – as a global challenge in efforts to combat crime.

"Residualism is particularly high among Namibian rhino syndicates, but is also prevalent in other sectors such as meat poaching," the report said.

"While court cases are ongoing, the suspects are being released on bail and re-arrested and charged for similar offences while on bail."

NEW POACHERS

The report also warns that new individuals are still getting involved in rhino-related crimes, with 61% of suspects arrested in 2024 as first offenders.

"It is imperative to show such first-time offenders through prompt prosecution and appropriate sentencing that wildlife crime is not rewarding."

According to the report, the rhino poaching crisis in Namibia is exacerbated by the reality that there are rarely serious consequences for rhino crimes.

Potential illicit profits from rhino poaching and horn smuggling therefore outweigh the potential consequences, while the far-reaching impact of rhino poaching does not receive the necessary attention.