

Protected plants seized near Arandis

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Suspects in custody

Authorities have seized 295 protected 'elephant's foot' plants near Arandis, with two suspects remaining in custody.

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Authorities have recovered 295 protected 'elephant's foot' plants after two suspects were arrested near Arandis.

The case relates to alleged plant poaching in the vicinity of Arandis after intelligence was received on 25 April about the possible illegal harvesting of succulent plants near a mine.

According to the incident report, a law enforcement team operating along the road between Usakos and Arandis spotted a white pick-up driving at high speed in the Valencia area. Two males were allegedly found loading 50 kg bags containing *Adenia pechuelii*, commonly known as elephant's foot.

The two suspects appeared in the Swakopmund Magistrate's Court and remain in custody. The adult suspect was identified as 33-year-old Tjipetekera Kuzatu. The second suspect is 16 years old and may not be named who is in custody of a guardian.

A well-placed source, said elephant's foot is a succulent plant targeted mainly for ornamental purposes.

"It is mostly exported for ornamental purposes. At this stage, we have not found that it is being used for anything else," the source said.

The source said the plants are attractive to collectors because of their appearance and scarcity, adding that they are often sought after as water-wise ornamental plants or bonsai-type specimens.

He warned that the removal of such plants from the wild causes lasting damage.

"When you remove the plant from nature, it leaves a gap. These plants grow slowly and many of them will not survive once removed," he said.

Network Media Hub understands that several similar incidents were reported earlier this year, and that the plants are often moved out of Namibia through regional corridors before being exported to buyers on other continents.

