



Pangolin saving scheme paying off

18 February 2019 | Environment

A reward scheme introduced in 2017 by Namibian authorities and NGOs to address an alarming increase of illegal pangolin captures and trafficking has proved successful.

By the end of January 2019, 75 criminal cases had been opened by the police related to pangolin trafficking, and 139 people arrested, while 45 live pangolins were confiscated and released safely back into the wild as a result of the reward programme.

All species of pangolins worldwide are facing the threat of extinction as a result of a thriving illegal market to supply the high demand of the animal's meat and scales to mostly China, which is decimating the population. In Namibia, the demand took hold over the past few years, and the reward scheme was introduced in an attempt to halt the trend of increased pangolin illegal poaching and smuggling. The Namibia Chamber of Environment (NCE), who in late 2017 partnered with the police and other stakeholders to strengthen the response to the rise in trafficking, say 84.9% of the cases opened since 2017 are a result of the reward programme.

Moreover, 85.9% of arrests resulted from information gained through the reward scheme. In 2017, when the cash reward scheme was launched, authorities offered N\$1 000 to any information that leads to an arrest with evidence. A higher amount would be awarded if the information leads to further arrests of traders, traffickers and syndicate member.

If an informant is prepared to make a statement and to appear as a voluntary witness, then the reward is again increased. Before the scheme was launched in October 2017, the average number of live or dead pangolins being confiscated in Namibia was typically in the range of about five to ten animals per year. Within the first two months after the scheme was launched, 15 criminal cases were opened and 21 suspects arrested.

Ten live pangolins were seized.

A year later, 57 cases had been opened, 112 suspects arrested, and 34 live pangolins confiscated.

Since January, a total of 45 live pangolins had been confiscated, taken into care, assessed for condition, cared for until healthy and then released back into a safe environment.

Pangolins are believed to be the most trafficked mammals in the world with more than one million animals illegally captured, killed and trafficked over the past decade, and more than 20 tonnes of pangolin scales and parts smuggled illegally each year. The 8th annual World Pangolin Day was held on Saturday, to increase awareness of the pangolin population's plight and vulnerability.

All pangolin species are threatened Red Data species under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and all have recently been up-listed to Appendix 1 category under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). Little data is available on the Namibian pangolin, the Temminck's Ground Pangolin, also known as the Cape pangolin or scaly anteater, despite its highly vulnerable status.

Pangolins are under threat due to a huge illegal global trade to supply buyers in Asia who eat the meat as a delicacy and use pangolin scales as a medical supplement. Pangolin foetuses and tongues are also highly prized. There is no evidence to support claims regarding medicinal properties of pangolin scales or any other part of the pangolin.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asset-saving-scheme-paying-off2019-02-180.jpg>)

CAUGHT: Otavi station commander Inspector Petrous Shoppe squatting next to a rescued pangolin after a farmworker was caught with the animal. PHOTO: NAMPA

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