



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

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PRESS RELEASE

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Lions in Erongo Region, Omaruru Area

With reference to reports and complaints of lions in the Omaruru area, Erongo Region, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism would like to clarify as follows:

Two unfortunate incidents where over two hundred small livestock were killed by lions in Torra Conservancy, Kunene Region occurred in November 2017. Officials of the Ministry were immediately dispatched to the area when informed about the incidents. A pride of ten to fifteen lions in the area was reported to have killed the livestock.

Preliminary investigations confirmed at the time that the first rains that were received in the Kunene Region, resulted in the dispersal of the presence and movements of wild animals in the area making it difficult for lions and other predators to find their natural prey.

Addressing Human-Wildlife Conflict requires striking a balance between conservation priorities and the needs of people who live with wildlife. Human wildlife conflict needs to be managed in a way that recognizes the rights and development needs of local communities and farmers, recognizes the need to promote biodiversity conservation, promotes self-reliance and ensures that decision-making is quick, efficient and based on the best available information.

In this regard, a decision was taken by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to capture and translocate this pride of ten to fifteen lions to areas where they will not cause any conflict with people. This specific pride was confirmed to consist of a pride of eight lions.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism had no other option but to move these lions to areas where they will not cause any conflicts with people. An alternative was to destroy all the eight lions but this is always the last option.

At the time of capture and translocation, there were three private game farms or groups of game farmers who had expressed interest to keep lions. Two of the three were not completely ready, and the third one which is Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary was ready. The Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary in the Omaruru area of the Erongo Region encompasses twenty member farms and twelve geographically incorporated supportive non-member farm units within and surrounding the Erongo Mountains in western Namibia.

MET was satisfied with their interest as the habitat is good and they have enough prey for lions. The area is big in size comprising an area of approximately 180 000 ha. Consultations including a meeting with the representatives of Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary was conducted with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism senior officials on the release of the lions.

Five lions out of the eight, of which all were sub-adult, were captured and translocated to Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The lions were received by the farm owners. Unfortunately one died due to capture myopathy (capture stress). Capture of the other three lions was attempted. However, the animals moved to inaccessible terrain and the operation was called off. The sentiments of local livestock owners had become considerably less hostile after the successful capture of the five animals.

It must be noted that lions naturally occur in the north western part of the country where the relocation occurred. Successful conservation efforts and the growth of communal conservancies in the country during the past twenty (20) years have resulted in an increase of wildlife populations. Nonetheless, the recent drought has reduced prey populations in certain areas which may have drawn lions to seek out livestock prey.

The growth of lion population in the north western Namibia has resulted in growth in tourism because nowhere else in the world can free-ranging lions be seen amongst sand dunes or on a beach. Lions should therefore be viewed as a national asset to Namibia that needs to be managed wisely to the optimum benefit of the Namibian people.

Our lion conflict reduction management strategies include capture and translocation to other areas where it is deemed that the animal will not cause conflict with people. Lions are captured and translocated to some identified areas. Should such animals continue to cause problems then they can be destroyed. Reduction management strategies also include trophy hunting of certain individual animals.

In order for the Ministry of Environment and Tourism to manage the human lion conflict, measures have been put in place and are being implemented.

This includes improved livestock husbandry. Most conflict situations arise from livestock management practices that leave animals vulnerable to predators, such as allowing livestock to wander untended during the day and not protecting them at night.

It must further be noted that Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary has enough prey for lions. Typical Namibian wild animals like kudu, oryx and springbok occur on the farms. Giraffe and eland were also reintroduced and occur in good numbers. The farms also have endemic Namibian ungulates such as Hartmanns zebra, damara dik dik and black faced impala. Food for the lions on the sanctuary is therefore not an issue.

Several lodges, guest and hunting farms and campsites have been created within the Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary. The lion population could add to tourism attraction in the area. Altogether 186 directly tourism related jobs have been created on the Sanctuary.

Although some people, mainly some individual commercial farmers neighbouring the Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary have complained about the introduction of these lions, there are also other predators in the area such as leopard, hyaena and cheetahs some of which might even be more dangerous to humans than lions based on the rare incidence of leopard attacks on humans compared to the extremely rare incidences of attacks or attempted attacks by lions. Lions have furthermore established themselves in the nearby Ugab River system and were anticipated to gradually extend their range southwards towards the western Omaruru River catchment in suitable habitat. In fact, in 2016 and 2017 reports of lions in the vicinity of Omaruru were received. The farmers concerned also (most of them) run tourism businesses in addition to livestock farming. The reasons to call for the removal of the lions may only be known to them. Until now, the Ministry has not received any substantiated reports that any of the translocated lions had left the Erongo

Mountain Rhino Conservancy or had been involved in any livestock conflict outside the conservancy.

To avoid any further public concern, a decision has nevertheless been taken that the Ministry of Environment and Tourism will now endeavor to capture these lions and translocate them to one of the National Parks. This capture operation is planned to start immediately. The Ministry would like to appreciate and thank the owners of the Erongo Mountain Rhino Sanctuary who had the interest and volunteered to keep these lions on their Sanctuary, for the conservation of lions in Namibia and benefits of the country from tourism and wildlife management.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism takes issues of Human Wildlife Conflict Management seriously. It is a complex and serious problem that if not addressed appropriately with the necessary understanding and respect, and managed effectively, can harm if not destroy conservation efforts and tourism benefits for the country. We recognize this threat and in this regard we have finalized the review of the National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management which has been approved, in principle, by Cabinet and will now be presented to Parliament.

Our officials remain on the ground to assist in all affected areas.

Sent via Email

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