

Namibia to export rhinos, elephants to populate Cuba zoo

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An elephant takes a bath in Leipzig zoo, in Germany, on July 28, 2013. Namibia will airlift 10 rhinoceros and five elephants to Cuba in September, concluding a massive translocation project of 135 animals taken from its national parks, the environment ministry said Wednesday.

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The 15 animals will be captured from the Etosha National Park in northern Namibia—one of the country's major tourist attractions—plus a nearby smaller game reserve, the Waterberg Plateau, environment and tourism deputy-minister Pohamba Shifeta told AFP.

The ambitious project, dubbed Noah's Ark II, has populated Cuba's 342-hectare (845-acre) National Zoo outside Havana.

A total of 120 animals of 23 species—including endangered black and [white rhinos](#), cheetahs, leopards and lions—were already transported to the Caribbean island nation in November.

Animal rights groups have protested the capture of [wild animals](#).

But Shifeta defended the translocation as Namibia's "token of appreciation" to Cuba for its support.

Cuba gave the southern African country political and military backing during its struggle for independence from South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.

"Cuban people were not complaining when their government was supporting us," Shifeta told AFP.

The donation is also aimed at helping Cuba establish a "proper wildlife programme", he added.

Several other species including the warthog, waterbuck, [wildebeest](#) and zebra did however not make the cut for veterinary reasons, according to local media reports.

Authorities are now racing to complete the translocation by September 6.

Meanwhile, the Namibian government has ordered over 400 springboks, kudus—another kind of antelope—and other non-[endangered animals](#) to be culled from four national parks to feed people threatened with hunger from a severe drought.

Authorities estimate that at least 400,000 people are facing hunger while Unicef has said more than 778,000 people—including 109,000 children under the age of five—are at risk of malnutrition.

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