



SSN Rhino Newsletter

Species Survival Network

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Arrests, court cases and convictions

Men held in Sweden for trading rhino horn

1 May, 2012

Two men were reportedly in police custody in Sweden on suspicion of having tried to trade illegally in rhino horn.

The two men were arrested while exiting from an auction house in Stockholm, following an extended surveillance operation lasting several years. Police believe that the men are part of a broader criminal network which is also involved in trafficking, copyright piracy and armed robbery.

Police described the case as "a matter of serious organized crime". If found guilty, the pair risk imprisonment for up to four years.

<http://www.thelocal.se/40566/20120501/>

US rhino horn trafficking case

8 May, 2012

An antiques dealer is among eight people snared so far in 2012, in the largest rhino horn smuggling bust in US history. US experts say that the trade in the US is driven by smugglers from Ireland, China, Vietnam, the United States and elsewhere. The antiques dealer is reported to have sawn the horns off a mounted rhino's head in a motel parking lot.

"Operation Crash", carried out by a task force convened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, resulted in the confiscation of 37 horns valued at USD 8 million to USD10 million.

Edward Grace, Deputy Chief of Law Enforcement for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, described the rhino horn trafficking operation as "similar to an operation of a drug cartel". Grace predicted that more arrests of Irish buyers would follow.

Maximum penalties in the US are a USD 250,000 fine and five years in prison for conspiracy and trafficking of endangered species, and USD100,000 and one year in prison for violating the Endangered Species Act.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5ikEgA90lrS7iLmP-rplQyhPdTieQ?docId=CNG.3a81d43933e045ff4dc46ca86c7bb6b3.b91>

Home of alleged South African rhino trade “kingpin” raided

9 May, 2012

A team of police officers seized assets from the home of alleged rhino syndicate kingpin Dawie Groenewald, as part of an ongoing investigation into the rhino poaching charges laid against him.

Police recorded the details of every appliance in the house and said that they would also visit the alleged rhino syndicate's other property in the hope of seizing valuable assets, including a helicopter and luxury cars. Police plan to recover R55 million worth of assets.

<http://www.eyewitnessnews.co.za/2012/05/09/Police%20swoop%20in%20seizing%20rhino%20poachers%20possessions.aspx>

Ten rhino horns seized after SMS tip-off, South Africa

16 May, 2012

South African police arrested a Vietnamese man after finding illegal rhino horns worth R15 million as well as millions in cash and foreign currency during a bust that came about as a result of an anonymous tip-off.

Ten rhino horns, an elephant tusk, cash and jewellery were found. Although the police could not disclose the amount of money found, it probably ran into the millions, said spokesman Colonel Vish Naidoo.

The operation was a result of an anonymous SMS tip-off and was a joint venture between the SAPS, Home Affairs Department officials and the Ekurhuleni Metro Police Department.

<http://www.thepost.co.za/rhino-horns-seized-after-sms-tip-off-1.1297933>

Vietnamese national caught with seven rhino horns, Mozambique

31 May, 2012

A Vietnamese national was apprehended at Maputo airport with seven rhino horns in his luggage. The man was arrested as he was about to board a Kenya Airways flight to Hanoi via Bangkok.

The man, identified as Doan Minh, 41, had already successfully passed through airport security screening when he was caught, according to the O Pais newspaper. The authorities did not confirm the origin of the rhino horns.

A week earlier, another Vietnamese man had been arrested at the airport while attempting to smuggle elephant tusks out of Mozambique.

http://www.portalangop.co.ao/motix/en_us/noticias/africa/2012/4/22/Mozambique-customs-arrest-rhino-horn-smuggler_1d5f73a9-036b-42b1-9e27-57afafd7c7a2.html

R40 million worth of rhino horn seized, South Africa

4 June, 2012

More than R40 million (USD 4.8 million) worth of rhino horn, as well as elephant tusks and leopard skins were seized in two operations in Gauteng. Both operations are linked to a 40-year-old KwaZulu-Natal man, who was arrested, along with six foreigners.

The man was allegedly facilitating the sale of 12 rhino horns to a multibillion-rand international syndicate. He is believed to be a link between poachers, foreign nationals who prepare the horns for sale and international buyers. Others arrested included three Chinese nationals and a Malawian man.

Sophisticated electronic scales, laptops, documents and files relating to the sale of rhino horn were also seized, along with two large horns apparently destined for China.

During a second operation, two Vietnamese nationals were arrested while cutting, weighing and packaging four horns for export.

Another six horns, weighing more than 55 kilograms, were found buried in the garden of an upmarket home on the Midrand Golfing Estate. Police also seized a Volvo and a Mercedes-Benz.

The police source stated that further arrests were imminent. It is believed that millions of Rands' worth of rhino horn have already been exported in recent months to China and Vietnam.

<http://www.2oceansvibe.com/2012/06/04/r40-million-worth-of-rhino-horn-seized-in-huge-sting/>

Zimbabwean rhino poachers sentenced to 17 years

29 June, 2012

Three men accused of using Local Government deputy minister Sessel Zvidzai's vehicle in rhino poaching early this year were yesterday sentenced to 17 years imprisonment after being convicted of killing one of the endangered animals at a farm in Macheke.

However, two of the men will effectively serve nine years in jail each while the third will complete seven years after two years were suspended from their respective sentences on condition they would not contravene any section of the Wildlife Act.

In addition, the trio was also ordered to pay \$20,000* to the farmer who owned the rhino.

The trio was arrested while trying to smuggle horns weighing 8.2kg valued at \$120,000* to South Africa. It is likely that they will later face murder charges resulting from the death of a game ranger shot dead at the same farm.

*Presumably Zimbabwean dollars

<http://www.newsday.co.zw/article/2012-06-29-poachers-jailed-17-years>

South African Wildlife Investigation Officer allegedly linked to rhino poaching

16 August 2012

A wildlife investigations officer who worked for Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife from 2004 is alleged to have been a double agent for international organised crime syndicates involved in rhino

poaching, and could be linked to the killing of 40 to 50 rhinos.

According to a Sunday Tribune report, after a year-long investigation by the police's Organised Crime Unit, suspicions have now been raised about a 'cover-up'. The investigator, Bheki Msweli, and his co-accused, Malusi Dubazane, appeared in the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court last week. They had already been charged with allegedly dealing in rhino horn and contravening environmental legislation, but their case was postponed to 7 September for investigation.

Dubazane had been arrested on rhino poaching charges in 2010 but was freed for lack of evidence. The two have now been linked to a network of international rhino horn syndicates. According to investigators, Msweli and Dubazane are believed to have been middlemen supplying and transporting rhino horn to accomplices in Gauteng.

<http://www.legalbrief.co.za/article.php?story=20120807095154955>

South African farmer jailed for 8 years over rhino horn

4 July, 2012

A South African game farm owner was jailed for eight years for the illegal possession of 38 rhino horns. Jacques Els was convicted in March 2012 of buying 30 horns for R 760,000 (USD 94,000) from Tommy Fourie, the manager of another game farm, who committed suicide a month after Els' arrest. Els also received a suspended sentence for possession of eight horns from rhinos that he owned.

<http://www.mysinthew.com/node/75096>

Rhino poaching

Rhino killed by poachers in India

21 May, 2012

After a gap of more than a year, a rhino has been killed by poachers in Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park. The poachers chopped off the tail of the rhino along with its horn.

The rhino was an adult female and was killed close to the park boundary, and only 300 metres from an anti-poaching camp. The animal was killed by four gun shots.

An officer conceded that the incident may have occurred as a result of dereliction of duty on the part of anti-poaching camp staff, despite an intelligence-led alert issued to all the camps located along the park boundary. The officer in charge was later suspended.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Orang-Rhino-killed-by-poachers/articleshow/13334401.cms>

Two rhinos poached in Mozambique

25 May, 2012

Two rhinos were reported poached at Sabie Game Park in Mozambique. The rhinos had been guarded every day by game guards and by a highly experienced anti-poaching unit manager.

In addition, there was aerial support from a Bantam micro light aircraft. The rhinos were left unguarded for only a few hours, and were never seen alive again.

Both rhinos had been shot 200 meters from where they were last seen.

<http://www.clubofmozambique.com/solutions1/sectionnews.php?secao=mozambique&id=24911&tipo=one>

Two Rhinos poached in Tanzania

27 May, 2012

Sometime in April or May 2012, two rhinos - a female named Sarah and her calf - were killed in Serengeti National Park, Tanzania.

Serengeti Member of Parliament Dr Steven Kebwe expressed surprise that the animals had been killed, as they were fitted with devices that are meant to set off an alarm whenever a human being gets within a radius of 600 metres of the animals.

It was also reported that a rhino named George, one of five translocated from South Africa, had been killed in the Serengeti in 2010.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201205270216.html>

Rhino owners allegedly dehorning and killing their own rhino, South Africa

19 July, 2012

It has been reported in the Cape Times that some rhino owners are allegedly dehorning or killing their own rhinos, selling the horns illegally and then claiming to be victims of poaching.

Three sources linked to the underworld, who could not be named, told the newspaper that they knew of game farm and reserve owners who were guilty of this crime.

The owners were either desperate for money or had realised that selling horns was more profitable than keeping their rhinos.

A police spokesperson, McIntosh Polela, told the newspaper that they were aware of the allegations but did not confirm whether or not they were investigating them.

<http://mg.co.za/article/2012-07-19-45-game-farmers-dehorning-killing-their-own-rhino>

South Africa's 2012 poaching tally reaches 312

13 August, 2012

The killing of seven more rhinos in South Africa's North-West Province brings the 2012 poaching total to 312 rhinos.

Five of the rhinos were found in Zeerust and, in a separate incident, a further two were killed at Marikana, according to a spokesperson for The Hawks police unit.

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2012-08/13/content_15669558.htm

Policy issues

South Africa bars Vietnamese hunters as rhino poaching surges

5 April, 2012

South Africa is reported to have barred Vietnamese nationals who have applied to hunt rhinos in the country, since it has not been assured that they will not sell the animals' horns illegally. All 23 rhino hunting applications made by Vietnamese residents in 2012 have been rejected, according to the Minister of Environmental and Water Affairs, Ms Edna Molewa.

Almost 60 percent of rhino hunting applications since the beginning of 2010 have been made by Vietnamese nationals.

The Minister also said that South African officials will interview prospective hunters to ensure that they have prior hunting expertise and do not intend to sell the trophy, and that trophy horns will be micro-chipped.

<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-04-05/south-africa-bars-vietnam-hunters-as-rhino-poaching-surges>

No South African rhino horn trade proposal in 2013?

4 May, 2012

It was reported in May that any South African proposal to CITES relating to trade in rhino horn would not be made until CoP17, according to the Department of Environmental Affairs.

The Minister, Ms Edna Molewa, said there were too many legal obstacles for South Africa to make a considered proposal to CITES next year, adding that Vietnam and China were important to any CITES proposal because South Africa would have to show it had prospective trade partners.

South Africa would also need to get backing from the European Union, which holds 27 of the 95 votes needed to approve trade.

<http://business.iafrica.com/businessday/792826.html>

Calls for South Africa to sell rhino horn through a central world body

21 May, 2012

The CEO of Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, Dr Bandile Mkhize, has proposed the creation of a global central selling organisation for rhino horn and has expressed the hope that the government will present an argument in favour of legalising rhino horn trade at CITES CoP16.

Dr Mkhize hopes to consult the De Beers diamond group to put together a strategy on a central world body to manage rhino horn sales. He plans to seek the advice of De Beers chairman Nicky Oppenheimer in a bid to understand orderly diamond selling.

He said speculative demand would decline because regular supplies of horn would meet market demand. Therefore there would be less scope for price increases. "It would effectively reduce demand for illegal horn, because the traditional medicine market in the Far East would prefer to trade in legal rhino horn", he added.

Ezemvelo is the only provincial conservation body in South Africa not monitored by SANParks.

<http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/sell-rhino-horn-legally-1.1300796>

CITES

SC62, Geneva July 23rd - 27th

Rhinos were discussed at the 62nd meeting of the CITES Standing Committee (SC). The Earth Negotiations Bulletin produced a Summary Report of the outcomes pertaining to rhinos as follows:

The SC endorsed the recommendations of its rhino working group, including:

- extending the working group's mandate in light of increasingly high levels of rhino poaching, and the continuing need to identify urgent short-term measures to reduce the illegal trade in rhinos and their parts and derivatives, with a view to making rapid progress towards making recommendations;
- requesting Viet Nam to submit a written report to the Secretariat for consideration by the working group, and encourage Viet Nam to urgently conclude the stock check of rhino hunting trophies to verify their use at the national level, fully investigate incidents where results of such verifications indicate that individuals are no longer in possession of horns they imported as trophies, and share the results with countries where the trophies originated from;
- encouraging all parties to ensure that they have adequate legislation and enforcement controls in place to prevent horns that are part of legally exported trophies from entering the illegal market;
- considering new ideas for a demand-reduction strategy based on current understanding of the evidence of traditional cultural practices and beliefs about the medicinal and beneficial properties of rhino horn, and other modern uses; and
- encouraging parties to consider taking opportunities to raise awareness of the rhino crisis at the highest possible level.

<http://www.iisd.ca/vol21/enb2172e.html>

Miscellany

Fourteen rhinos drowned in floods in India

July 2012

Incessant rains have caused water levels on India's Brahmaputra River and its tributaries to rise and flood forests, farmlands and villages across northern India. In July, the waters reached dangerous levels in Kaziranga National Park, which is home to tigers, elephants, one-horned rhinos and many other species.

As the water levels in Kaziranga rose, many animals left the safety of Kaziranga, located in the floodplains, and moved to safer higher ground. However to reach the higher ground, they had to cross a major road, making them vulnerable to poaching.

Reported casualties included those of 14 one-horned rhinos, an elephant and more than 500 deer.

<http://www.wildlifeextra.com/go/news/kaziranga-floods.html#cr>

► The SSN Rhino Newsletter is produced by the SSN Rhino Working Group as a service to CITES Parties. If you have news that you would like included in a future issue, please do not hesitate to contact us, Mark Jones and Susie Watts, Co-chairs, SSN Rhino Working Group at: mjones@hsi.org

