



SSN Rhino Newsletter

Species Survival Network

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Arrests, court cases and convictions

Farmers sentenced for rhino poaching, South Africa

Ewart Potgieter and Riaan Vermaak pleaded guilty in the Vryheid Regional Court this week to charges of conspiracy to hunt rhino and attempting to hunt rhino, and the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition.

Potgieter was sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment - six years for conspiracy to hunt rhino and attempting to hunt rhino, 10 years for possession of illegal firearms and two years for possession of illegal ammunition.

Vermaak received 10 years and six months - six years for conspiracy to hunt rhino and attempting to hunt rhino, four years for possession of illegal firearms and six months for possession of illegal ammunition. They will serve an effective 11 years and seven-and-a-half years respectively.

Their alleged accomplices were game rangers at the Mkuze Falls Private Game Reserve. Undercover police agents, posing as hunters, were taken to the reserve, ostensibly to poach 10 rhinos.

Daily News, South Africa, August 16, 2012

<http://www.iol.co.za/dailynews/news/farmers-sentenced-for-rhino-poaching-1.1363872#.UCz-rD1ISVo>

Father and son plead guilty to rhino horn smuggling, USA

Two members of an international rhinoceros horn smuggling ring are reported to have pleaded guilty in a Los Angeles federal court to illegal wildlife trafficking, money laundering and tax evasion.

Vinh Chuong "Jimmy" Kha and Felix Kha, who have been in jail since their homes and import-export business were raided in February, are likely to face around five more years in prison.

The father-son team will forfeit more than \$2.5 million in smuggling profits, including cash, gold ingots, diamonds, jewellery and gold Rolex watches. The men also owe the Internal Revenue Service a total of almost USD 186,000 in unpaid taxes.

In addition, Jimmy Kha had paid a USD 150,000 bribe in 2011 to customs officials in Vietnam, according to court records.

The two men were part of an organized ring of wildlife traffickers buying up old rhino horn

trophies at auction, along with mounted heads and other rhino body parts. These were smuggled out of the United States and sold for much higher prices in Vietnam and China.

Jimmy and Felix Kha were expected to be sentenced on December 10th, 2012.

Los Angeles Times, USA, September 16, 2012

<http://www.latimes.com/health/la-me-rhino-smugglers-20120916,0,7568821.story>

Poachers arrested in Mozambique

Police in Mozambique have arrested two suspected poachers with 11 kg of rhino horns, Radio Mozambique has reported. The rhinos were slaughtered in the Limpopo National Park, while the suspects were arrested in the southern province of Gaza.

Police said the suspects were transporting the horns in a vehicle when they were arrested.

Forest authorities said at least 10 elephants and 10 rhinos are slaughtered every month in the Limpopo park, and Police said a number of poachers have been killed by forest guards. Many poachers also kill each other in disputes over ivory and rhino horns.

NewsTrack India, October 17, 2012

<http://www.uniteagainstopoaching.co.za/index.php/news/278-11kg-of-rhino-horn-seized-in-mozambique>

Police raid South African hunter's home

In October, the South African police dog unit raided the luxurious home of professional hunter and game farmer Hugo Ras, following information received during the week.

Ras, the former owner of Ras Safaris, had already been arrested more than a year earlier, when an illegal firearm and five crates of scheduled veterinary drugs were confiscated during the raid.

Ras, who has several previous convictions related to nature conservation transgressions, was subsequently released on R5000 bail.

Earlier in 2012, the world-renowned wildlife veterinarian and former head of the Kruger Park's game capturing unit, Dr Douw Grobler, was also arrested and charged, along with Ras, with contravening the Medicines and Related Substances Control Act.

Ras was due back in court on Monday, November 5.

The New Age, South Africa, October 29, 2012

http://www.thenewage.co.za/67622-1100-53-Police_raid_home_of_hunter_with_links_to_rhino_poaching

Four rhino poachers arrested in India

Newspaper reports from India suggest that rhino poachers may be devising new methods of poaching rhinos in Kaziranga National Park. Tranquillisers were recovered from four poachers who were arrested near Kaziranga on Thursday 8.

Police raided several villages on the fringes of the Agaratoli range of the national park and arrested four rhino poachers. During the search, ketamine hydrochloride (also known as Aniket), a tranquilliser used for capturing the big cats such as tiger and leopards, was recovered..

"We are now looking at whether it was used in rhino poaching or whether it can be mixed with other chemicals and used as a powerful tranquilliser for rhinos or if there is a bigger plan to poach the big cats," a senior police official said. The police have launched a massive search operation for the guns which are required for shooting the tranquillisers.

More than 40 Kaziranga rhinos have died this year, half of them as a result of poaching.

The park's Director commented that "we have come across recent cases of poaching where gun shots were not heard.....we are worried as to how the poachers are getting access to these tranquillisers".

Tehelka, India, November.8, 2012

http://www.tehelka.com/story_main54.asp?filename=Ws081112POACHING.asp

South African Minister hails rhino sentence

South African Justice Minister Jeff Radebe has welcomed the 40-year sentence given to a Thai national for selling rhino horns. Chumlong Lemtongthai pleaded guilty to paying prostitutes to pose as hunters to obtain horns, which were then sold on Asia's traditional medicine market, according to press reports.

Lemtongthai and his accomplices were thought to have netted around 26 rhino horns. In handing down sentence, the magistrate said he did not want his grandchildren to grow up without being able to see rhinos.

According to the South African Revenue Service (SARS), Lemtongthai was arrested in 2010 with five other suspects, and was charged on various counts of fraud, customs and excise violations, and transgressions of environmental legislation. Lemtongthai pleaded guilty to 59 of these charges

In a statement SARS said that the conviction of one individual was not a sufficient deterrent against rhino poaching and urged law enforcement and state agencies to do more to combat fraud, corruption, and abuse of the entire system that includes the movement of passengers into and out of South Africa, the issuing of hunting permits, the illicit transfer of money, and the enforcement of environmental and other laws.

SAPA, South Africa, November 9, 2012

<http://news.iafrica.com/sa/826548.html>

Senior officer suspended over rhino deaths, South Africa

A senior conservation manager with more than 20 years' experience has been suspended by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife following investigations into the massacre of rhinos at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in Zululand.

While the officer has not officially been charged, an official is quoted as saying that "evidence points to negligence [on his part] in carrying out his duties. Preliminary investigations reveal his absence during the terrible weekend period when rangers found seven carcasses poached". On September 21, rangers carrying out a reconnaissance flight over the southern corridor of the park found seven rhino carcasses. Two more carcasses were found later at other locations.

It is believed some of the carcasses had been lying in the bush for as long as 45 days, while others had been poached between three days and two weeks before being found.

Zululand reserves were targeted by rhino poachers between September and November. The number of rhino killed in KwaZulu-Natal has reached 59, compared with 34 in 2011.

The Post, South Africa, November 12, 2012

<http://www.thepost.co.za/senior-officer-suspended-over-rhino-deaths-1.1421376#.UKDU4a5Xzw>

Rhino poaching

Poachers kill 100 South African rhinos in two months

Poachers have killed 100 rhinoceros in South Africa in less than two months. More than half of the animals were killed in the Kruger National Park.

Heightened security measures have failed to stop the criminal syndicates that officials say are responsible for the killing. Soldiers and specialist investigators have been deployed to national parks to battle the poachers.

However, departmental spokesperson Albie Modise said "if you don't address the demand outside South Africa, you will not win the battle."

Agence France Presse, September 12, 2012

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5g1GteFlvaUFHdxlu_J1BOWLFsB_g?docId=CNG.2a65c44a40e732eca8a978eae36ce02b.4c1

Zimbabwe losing rhinos rapidly

Raoul du Toit, advisor to the International Rhino Foundation, said on World Rhino Day that Zimbabwe is losing its rhinos at rate of one or two per month.

Poachers are targeting the country's privately-owned reserves including the Save Valley Conservancy in the southeast of the country.

Zimbabwe was reported in September to have around 400 black rhinos and 280 white rhinos left in the wild.

Eye Witness News, South Africa, September 22, 2012

<http://www.traffic.ewn.co.za/2012/09/22/Zim-losing-rhinos-rapidly>

Poachers shoot four rhinos in India

Poachers shot four rhinoceroses, two of them fatally, on the fringe of the Kaziranga National Park in September 2012. Taking advantage of heavy rains that have caused flooding across Assam state, the poachers escaped with the horns of the four rhinos.

An estimated 2,500 of the world's 3,000 greater one-horned rhinos live in Kaziranga Park.

Other reports indicate that a total of 13 rhinos have been killed by poachers around the park in the past nine months, a trend that has caused worry among environmental groups.

The Associated Press, September 26/27, 2012

<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/09/26/indian-vets-trying-to-save-extremely-rare-rhino-after-it-was-shot-and-dehorned/>

<http://www.theprovince.com/news/Poachers+shoot+dehorn+rare+rhinoceros+Indias+northeast/7307707/story.html>

Armed militias pose a threat to rhinos in India

The Indian press has reported that armed separatist militias pose a serious threat to rhinos in Assam.

Lindok Rongpi confessed to poaching six rhinos under the instructions of Songja Timung, the self-styled Defence Secretary of Kuki National Liberation Front, one of the armed groups in Assam. His arrest led the police to identify the main buyer, a Chinese man named Ho-Chin, but he had fled.

The money made by poaching rhinos is used to buy arms. Post-mortems of the animals revealed that they had been killed by automatic weapons.

In a number of poaching cases, the rhinos were dehorned while alive. In one case, the ear was chopped off and the animal left to bleed to death.

There are several stark reminders of militants targeting wildlife in Assam. In the eighties the Laukhowa sanctuary, not far from Kaziranga, had its entire rhino population wiped out, allegedly by United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Manas lost its world heritage site status after Bodo militants wiped out all its animals, including the rhino. Press reports speculate that, with a number of armed groups in the area, Kaziranga National Park could be in similar danger.

NDTV, India, October 24, 2012

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/rhino-poacher-arrested-in-assam-confesses-to-militants-involvement-283686>

Seizures

Rhino Horns Seized in Philippines

In September, Philippines Customs officials at Manila port seized six rhinoceros horns, weighing around 13 kilogrammes, hidden inside 300 sacks of cashew nuts from Mozambique.

The horns had arrived at the container port almost two weeks earlier.

The import of the rhino horns was undeclared, which was a violation of the Philippines Tariff and Customs Code and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Deputy Commissioner Danilo Lim said the shipper of the cashews, Chisteva Import and Export of Mozambique, did not file an entry for its consignee and broker, which raised suspicion among Customs intelligence agents that the import was illegal. Hence the inspection of the cashew nuts, during which the rhino horns were found. However, press reports suggest that Chisteva may be a fictitious company, as there has not yet been any confirmation that such a company exists in Mozambique.

Press reports state that Mozambicans are known to have been involved in poaching rhinos in South Africa's Kruger National Park. Earlier this year, a South African court sentenced three Mozambicans to 25 years in prison for their part in the slaughter of rhinos.

Allafrica.com, September 10, 2012

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201209110249.html>

Seven rhino horns seized at Noi Bai airport in Vietnam

In November, customs officers at Noi Bai airport, Hanoi, seized seven rhino horn hidden in the luggage of two passengers who had arrived from Qatar.

The horns were discovered in deposited luggage belonging to Nguyen Van Chien and Nguyen Van Than, both from Hanoi. The two men had flown from Qatar to Hanoi that day.

Neither Van Chien or Van Than had reported the horns in their customs declaration sheets and both had failed to show an import license for the horns or any documents about their origin.

The horns weighed 23.5 kg in total and were wrapped in layers of plastic and silver paper. Before wrapping the horn with those materials, the men had spread garlic on the horns to disguise their natural scent and avoid detection by police dogs, customs officers said.

Officials detained the passports of the two traffickers and sent the horns to the Vietnam Science and Technology Institute for testing to determine which species of rhino they had belonged to.

In a separate incident, traffic police in northern Quang Ninh Province caught a man with three pieces of a horn, suspected to be that of a rhino, hidden in his backpack.

The suspect confessed to police that he had been paid USD 96 by a friend of his to take the horn parts to Cam Pha Town.

Tuoi Tre News, Vietnam, November 8, 2012

<http://www.tuoiitrenews.vn/cmmlink/tuoiitrenews/society/7-rhino-horns-seized-at-hanoi-s-noi-bai-airport-1.91429>

Rhino horn seized, India

Karbi Anglong police arrested a senior rebel of the Kuki Revolutionary Army, Chandra Singh, from his rented house and recovered a rhino horn from his procession.

The superintendent of police told The Telegraph that a high-level police team arrested Singh around 4am on 23 November. "The horn probably belonged to a rhino killed around a month or two ago," he said.

The Telegraph, India, November 24, 2012

<http://in.news.yahoo.com/rhino-horn-seized-224258524.html>

International co-operation

Southern Africa: Regional block unhappy with China and Vietnam

The Governments of southern Africa were reported to have voiced their disappointment with China and Vietnam for not doing enough to stop poaching in the region.

They registered this protest in a workshop organized by the Southern Africa Wildlife Conservation which was attended by quite a number of countries in the region. Kenya and the Republic of South Africa accused the two countries (China and Vietnam) of being reluctant to enact strict laws to stop their citizens from purchasing elephant tusks and rhino horns from Africa.

Kenya Wildlife Service senior assistant director Patrick Omondi disclosed that efforts to engage the Chinese and Vietnamese Government to enact strict laws to prevent the purchase have not been successful.

"There are always delays in prosecution. The justice system is too low and there is no consistency in law," added Hector Magome, the executive managing member of Conservation Services in South Africa. "Some poachers are fined very little in certain regions of the country and others fined highly in other regions."

The participants called for tougher sanctions against those who are found in engaging in this activity and encouraged more public education in their respective countries.

National Turk, Turkey, November 7, 2012

<http://www.nationalturk.com/en/southern-africa-regional-block-unhappy-with-china-and-vietnam-handling-of-poaching-laws-27696>

South Africa signs rhino deal with Vietnam

South African Minister of Water and Environmental affairs, Edna Molewa, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with her counterpart in Vietnam. This is hoped to bring law enforcement from both countries together in working to bring down the boom in rhino poaching and the illegal trade in its horn.

Ms Molewa said " South Africa is looking forward to receiving the close cooperation from Vietnamese partners to stop the illegal trade of rhino horns from South Africa to Vietnam".

Press reports indicate that, with 618 rhinos poached so far in 2012, compared with 448 in 2011, the ministry was using every tool possible to change the rapid escalation in numbers.

Cao Duc Phat, Vietnam's Minister of Agricultural and Rural Development, is quoted as saying that Vietnam had made strong commitments to tackle the illegal use of rhino horns, and would increase that commitment, adding that the two countries would draw up a very detailed plan to address the rhino problem.

A spokesman for South Africa said that most of the details of the MoU would be ready by the next CITES conference in March 2013. In addition to rhinos, the MoU extends to several other areas of biodiversity protection and cooperation, and runs for five years before it has to be extended

Mail & Guardian, South Africa, December 10, 2012

<http://mg.co.za/article/2012-12-10-south-africa-signs-rhino-deal-with-vietnam-2>

Trophy Hunting

South Africa faults trophy hunting firms amid poaching crisis

Following a series of raids, the Environment Ministry commented that many South African trophy hunting companies fail to meet industry regulations in a country hard-hit by poaching.

Investigators found that tannery and taxidermy industries failed to comply with the Threatened Or Protected Species Regulations (TOPS) and national standards regarding the marking of trophies from rhinos and their horns, as well as other species.

The most frequent issues of non-compliance related to the absence of hunting registers and the absence of TOPS permits, the department said in a statement.

According to environmental regulations, tannery operators were expected to obtain licences to transport rhino horns from trophy hunts to taxidermists for processing and export.

Taxidermists are required to keep a register detailing the receipt of rhino horns, their weight and the numbers of micro-chips inserted inside the horns.

Agence France Presse, August 22, 2012

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jG9aolGj14jVlpD_8jeVEDqRaUCQ?docId=CNG.4c2df45bf817991e968f8e33dce51978.571

Dead rhino given to a friend in Vietnam came from a legal hunt.

Ngo Thanh Nhan, who presented a dead South African white rhino as a gift to banker Tram Be, who was later reported to have had the horn stolen from his home, is on the list of Vietnamese individuals allowed to import rhinos to the country, according to the deputy director of the CITES Management Authority of Vietnam

Thanh Nhan imported the animal into Vietnam in 2006, after killing it in a legal hunt in South Africa.

Thanh Nhan said that, in 2007, he handed over the dried and stuffed rhino to Tram Be, vice-chairman of the Board of Management of Sacombank, at a party to celebrate Be's new house.

Be attracted national headlines in Viet Nam when his security guards reported to police that the rhino horn had been stolen from his villa. Be himself kept silent about the theft.

Press reports indicate that the CITES authorities, suspicious that the horn had been illegally traded prior to the theft, began to look into the case.

Thanh Nhan said he was "invited" to join a tourism and hunting trip to South Africa in 2006, by a local company. He was assisted in acquiring the license for rhino hunting. "I had to be appropriately trained to use weapons and acknowledge all of the hunting rules," he said, adding that it took three shots to kill the rhino.

More than 100 Vietnamese nationals are reported to have been licensed to import rhinos, and the country also possesses the largest number of applicants to go hunting in South Africa.

However, South Africa has now stopped licensing Vietnamese hunters this year due to concerns over their breaching of hunting and trading laws.

Tuoi Tre News, Viet Nam, October 9, 2012

<http://www.tuoiitrenews.vn/cmmlink/tuoiitrenews/society/man-who-gifts-rhino-to-banker-a-legal-hunter-cites-1.88277>

Rhino horn use

Are investors driving the illegal wildlife trade?

A new survey of the illegal trade in wildlife across Asia, conducted by a consortium of wildlife and conservation NGO's and media companies, has concluded that young people are driving the trade.

The most prolific purchasers of animal products are wealthy urban males aged between 25 and 45. These young men are not buying rhino horn, for example, as cures for cancer or fertility boosts but as status symbols and investments.

Consumer profiles collected during the survey across 15 Asian countries indicated that the quest for prestige and higher status is driving much of the current slaughter of elephants, tigers, pangolins, bears, and rhinos.

The coalition that conducted the survey agreed to coordinate educational efforts, with joint campaigns being designed in several countries. The Governments of Vietnam, China, Thailand and the USA are currently being courted as partners, while business leaders, celebrities and other opinion leaders are also being actively recruited.

Wildlife News, UK, September 7, 2012

<http://wildlifeneews.co.uk/2012/are-investors-driving-the-illegal-wildlife-trade/>

Is rhino new choice for Vietnamese moneyed men to show off?

Local moneyed men in Vietnam have been reported as showing off their wealth and status by filling their living rooms with wild animals such as tigers, leopards, and now, a rhino.

According to the Vietnamese press, a number of tour organizers have offered "tourism plus hunting" trips to South Africa, with a package to hunt white rhinos advertised on the websites of such companies costing from USD 55,000 to \$150,000.

Black rhino trips were reported as being a little more expensive, ranging between USD 250,000 and USD 350,000. Hunters must also apply for a license, which costs another \$1,000.

Vietnamese CITES officials were quoted as saying that most of the international rhino hunters licensed in South Africa are Vietnamese, and Customs authorities stated that Viet Nam is also a lucrative market for illegal trade in wild and endangered animals.

Press reports state that between 2006 and the present, police have detected 11 rhino horn trafficking cases from Africa, and four illegal trading cases in the domestic market. Reports also suggest that Vietnam has increasingly been engaged in activities to prevent the killing and trading of endangered animals, and the news that a large number of Vietnamese individuals are licensed to kill and bring rhinos home has infuriated conservationists.

A student activist is quoted as saying that, while restaurants selling meat from endangered animals can be raided and fined, those who secretly display rhinos or tigers at their residences are apparently safe from authorities' detection.

Tuoi Tre News, Viet Nam, October 10, 2012

<http://www.tuoi-trenews.vn/cmlink/tuoi-trenews/city-diary/is-rhino-new-choice-for-vn-moneyed-men-to-show-off-1.88360>

CITES

Kenya has submitted a proposal to CoP16 (CoP16 Prop.10) with the intention of amending the annotation currently attached to the Appendix II listing of the southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) populations of South Africa and Swaziland:

CoP16 Prop 10:

To amend the annotation for *Ceratotherium simum simum* as follows:

(added text underlined): "*Ceratotherium simum simum (Only the populations of South Africa and Swaziland; all other populations are included in Appendix I. For the exclusive purpose of allowing international trade in live animals to appropriate and acceptable destinations and hunting trophies. Hunting trophies from South Africa and Swaziland shall be subject to a zero export quota until at least CoP18. All other specimens shall be deemed to be specimens of species included in Appendix I and the trade in them shall be regulated accordingly)*"

The proposal can be found here:

http://www.cites.org/common/cop/16/prop/raw/CoP16-Prop-KE-Ceratotherium_simum_simum.pdf

The Secretariat (CoP16 Doc. 54.2) and the Rhino Working Group of the Standing Committee (CoP16 Doc. 54.1) have submitted their reports:

<http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/16/doc/E-CoP16-54-02.pdf> (Secretariat)

<http://www.cites.org/common/cop/16/doc/E-CoP16-54-01.pdf> (SC Rhino Working Group)

Miscellany

Rhino horn auction in Canada

The sale of a rhinoceros horn at an auction in Victoria has raised the ire of one animal rights' group.

It is illegal to sell rhino horns taken after 1975, but the 37-cm horn, which was sold for \$14,000 at an auction house, is believed to be legal, according to the auction house manager.

Campaigners with the Vancouver Animal Defence League said the age of the horn should not make a difference, stating that "It's time to make this connection to what's happening in Africa and have a no-tolerance policy for the trade in any kind of animal parts that's contributing to endangered species."

The organization is calling on the federal government to legislate a ban on sales of all rhino horns.

CBC News, August 29, 2012.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2012/08/29/bc-rhino-horn-auction.html>

- SSN would like to take this opportunity to wish all readers of the rhino newsletter a happy and peaceful holiday season.
- 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. mjones@hsi.org