

the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) scientists develop a reference database for the origin of elephant ivory using stable isotopes. They present the first results of the isotope method and report on the current status of the database in an article in the TRAFFIC bulletin Vol. 24/No.2 (page 56). See: <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin-download>

WWF Petition against legal ivory trade in Thailand

The WWF circulates in 20 countries a petition to close down the ivory trade in Thailand. Supposedly the country has the biggest unregulated market for ivory in the world. Although it is against the law to sell ivory from African elephants in Thailand, ivory from domestic Thai elephants can be sold legally. As a result, massive quantities of illegal African ivory are being laundered through Thai shops according to the WWF. The organization plans to collect 1 million signatures and hand them over to the Thai Prime Minister during the forthcoming Conference of Parties, which will take place in Bangkok in March.

Namibia: Cabinet approves the hunting of black rhino males

The Namibian Cabinet approved the hunting of five male black rhino males to be hunted between 2013 and 2017 on concessions which are on state-owned land outside registered conservancies. The approved concessions are Mahango Core Area and Mangetti National Park in the Western Kavango, Waterberg Plateau Park, Daan Viljoen and Von Bach Parks and Naukluft Area, which is part of the Namib Naukluft Park. The concessions will be awarded through a tender process. The "National Policy on Tourism and Wildlife Concessions on State Land" provide directives and guidelines and trophy hunting. The revenue has been reinvested in wildlife conservation and management through the Game Trust Fund. The same policy also provided incentives for black economic empowerment within the trophy hunting industry. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism awards hunting concessions for a period of five years but with the condition that the ministry will reserve the right to renew the contract after three years as well as to adjust quotas as information is collected about the status of the indicated wildlife populations. To protect the local hunting industry from unlawful operators and to minimize risks, the ministry will announce the Conditions of Sale before the auction. In Namibia, trophy hunting takes place on commercial farms and communal registered conservancies as well as in proclaimed protected areas and on other state land.

Namibia: Black Rhino poached in Kunene Region

A Namibian man is alleged to have killed a black rhino and removing the horns in the Kunene region close to Khorixas, confirmed deputy commissioner, Edwin Kanguatjivi, head of Nampol's public relations division in Windhoek. The calf which was with the dead rhino was also found dead at the scene. If found guilty, the man could face up to 20 years in prison or be fined N\$200 000. He appeared in the Opuwo Magistrate's Court on December 27 and was denied bail. According to the acting permanent secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Diyando Kapinga "it is true that poaching of Black rhino in Namibia is very rare as Namibia had clean poaching record/ cases for quite some times now." According to Simon Uri-khob, director of training and community outreach of the Save the Rhino Trust, the community should be applauded for their part in bringing the culprit to book. "We were informed by a community member who saw the dead animal and we alerted the police. In less than 24 hours, the man was arrested," said Urikhob. "The people in the Kunene region regard these animals as their own and we would like to acknowledge their input," said Uri-khob.

South Africa: SANParks launched state-of-the-art aerial surveillance

The Ichikowitz Family Foundation and South African National Parks (SANParks) launched a new, state-of-the-art aerial surveillance solution to save South Africa's rhinos. Ivor Ichikowitz, who is also executive chairman of Africa's largest privately held defense and aerospace company, Paramount Group, handed the Seeker Seabird a unique specialist reconnaissance aircraft to David Mabunda, CEO of SANParks. The aircraft incorporates highly sophisticated surveillance technology such as thermal imaging that will deliver more enhanced and powerful observation capability. The plane shows high degree of flexibility in terms of utilization, use of operation and reliability. It is capable of flying at high altitude and at slow speeds with 270 degrees visibility. It can be forward positioned on short dirt strips and requires very limited logistical support.

Such sophisticated technology is welcome in the fight against rhino poaching, however its effectiveness is yet to be put to the test. Identifying potential poachers is one thing, deploying staff to intercept them, especially at night, is another matter.