



Vietnamese citizen Tool Griton at the Kempton Park Magistrates Court on May 18, 2012 in Johannesburg, South Africa where he appeared for possession of fraudulent rhino hunting certificates. (Photos by Gallo Images)

Crime & justice

By Colonel Johan Jooste, SAPS Hawks

There is growing concern about the impact of legal and illegal wildlife trade on the wildlife populations worldwide. Every year thousands of animals are removed from their natural habitats and smuggled between countries all over the world for the pet trade or for the illegal use of animal parts in traditional medicine and ornaments.

International wildlife smuggling presents several potential environmental and national security threats. Threats to the environment include the potential loss of biodiversity, the introduction of invasive species into the ecosystem and the transmission of diseases through illegal wildlife trade including the illegal bushmeat trade.

National security threats include links between wildlife trafficking, organised crime, money laundering and possible drug, firearm and human trafficking. Wildlife source and transit countries may be especially prone to exploitation if they are known to have poor law

enforcement, corrupt governments and porous borders.

Illegal wildlife trade involves the illicit procurement, transport and distribution – internationally, trans-nationally and nationally – of animals, animal parts and derivatives thereof, and/or any plant, plant part or any derivatives thereof, in contravention of laws, foreign and domestic, and treaties. Illegal wildlife trade ranges in scale from single-item, local bartering to multi-tonne commercial-sized consignments shipped all over the world.

Wildlife contraband may include live animals, hunting trophies, fashion accessories, cultural artefacts and ingredients for traditional medicines,



Leopard skin, Guangzhou, China.



A crocodile in captivity, Mali.



Posters by Members of Activists for Animals Africa are on display at the trial of Thai national Chumlong Lemthongthai at the Kempton Park Magistrate's Court on November 5, 2012 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Lemthongthai pleaded guilty to trading in rhino horn - but his co-accused walked free.
(Photo by Gallo Images / The Times / Daniel Born)

wild meat for human consumption (or bush meat) and other products.

In South-Africa, the wildlife trade (legal and illegal trade and poaching) includes various species, such as elephant ivory, abalone, cycads, reptiles, birds and bird eggs, as well as the ever-increasing poaching for rhino horn.

The SAPS has declared the illegal killing of rhinos and the illegal trade in rhino horn as a priority crime, and elevated this to the National Joint Security Committee (NATJOINTS) in South Africa. Thus the approach to address rhino-related matters is addressed in a multi-dimensional way, which includes all government departments.

Scope of the threat

The illicit wildlife trade acts as a recipient and enabler for other forms of organised crime. The illegal wildlife trade can affect the natural resources and environment of importing and exporting countries. The potential environmental harm of the illegal wildlife trade include:

1. Reducing biodiversity.
2. Disrupting ecosystems by introducing non-native species.
3. Transmitting of diseases of both animals and man.

4. Monetary value and the loss of income to the country that have a direct impact on the economy.

Environmental implications

Threats to biodiversity – The illegal trade may directly contribute to the decline of some species. The extinction of species as a result of trade is uncertain, although the exploitation combined with habitat loss and alteration is linked to significant declines in several species.

Invasive species – Illegal wildlife trade may introduce harmful, non-native species that could disrupt ecosystems. It can affect human, animal and plant health, causing considerable economic and environmental damage. Some banned species, however, still enter the country illegally through trade. The impact of non-native species is also considered a contributing factor for listing indigenous species as endangered or threatened.

Disease – Another concern includes the potential entry and spread of animal-borne diseases through the illegal trade in wildlife. These diseases may affect not only humans and result in outbreaks that cause

social and economic harm, but also threaten native wildlife, domestic stock and ecosystems.

Security implications

The impact of wildlife smuggling has the potential to reach beyond environmental threats. Organised criminal syndicates are among the primary culprits involved in large-scale to commercial-sized wildlife trafficking. The participation of such actors in wildlife trafficking can threaten the stability of the country, foster corruption and encourage the use of violence to protect the trade.

Organised crime structures are strategically placed nationally and supported by their structures in neighbouring countries and further abroad.

Illegal trade/poaching of rhinos

South Africa is at the forefront of the struggle to combat the trade in endangered species, and in particular with the ever-increasing poaching and illegal trade in rhino horn. Given the concentration of especially the rhinos within the borders of one country, it is likely that the poaching and smuggling of rhino horn will escalate as the market demand for this product increases for the foreseeable future.

The devastating and far-reaching effect of this trade presents a serious threat to the national heritage and economic conditions of this country, and constitutes a challenge to law enforcement bodies worldwide.

The primary motivation to engage in the illegal wildlife trade appears to be economic gain and greed. Continued demand in many parts of the world for illegal wildlife provides opportunities for criminals to turn profits along the supply chain. The illegal wildlife trade is ranked among the most lucrative illicit economies in the world, behind illegal drugs, and possibly human and arms trafficking.

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Veterinarian Charles van Niekerk assisted by Danielle Sneider and Johan Steenkamp injecting an antiparasitic treatment to Spencer the Rhino's horn at the Rhino and Lion Park on February 9, 2012 in Krugersdorp, South Africa as an antipoaching preventative measure. Although the antiparasitic is toxic to humans, deterring poaching, it does not harm the animal. Unfortunately Spencer did not recover from the sedation and died. (Photos by Gallo Images / Foto24 / Nelius Rademan)

In Asia, where possibly the largest portion of the illegal wildlife trade takes place, demand is driven by the need for specific animal parts to practise traditional Asian medicine, for human consumption and as a symbol of wealth.

Numerous factors explain the persistence of the international black market in wildlife. One such factor is the high profits associated with wildlife trafficking. Driven by the demand for wildlife products that exceeds what the market can legally supply, the value of illegal wildlife continues to increase, because consumers are willing to pay greater amounts. Thus, as a certain type of animal or wildlife product becomes more endangered and rare, its price increases along with the financial rewards for the smugglers.

Another factor is the perceived low risk of capture or penalties associated with wildlife trade. The wildlife trade may be considered less risky as the penalties associated with wildlife crime tend to be substantially less severe than

for other trafficking crimes. According to reports, powdered rhinoceros horn can be worth more than the equivalent weight of cocaine or gold.

Background

The rhino poaching threat in South Africa is impacting all nine provinces as well as the Kruger National Park (KNP), Borokolalo National Park, Madikwe, Pilanesberg National Park and Marakele National Park (MNP). A total of 668 rhinos have been illegally hunted in SA since January 2012, and a total of 267 arrests have been made for the same time period.

The poaching activities are driven by an international illegal trade and the demand for rhino horn. The poaching activities are coordinated by international and local organised crime elements.



Understanding the threat

When considering the extent of the threat, and being able to fully understand the threat, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Crimes involved
- Traditional poaching as currently experienced
- Wildlife rhino industry
- International demand
- Pseudo hunting
- Modus operandi
- Levels and tactics

a) Crimes involved

- Restricted activities as regulated by NEMBA Act 10/2004:
 - o Illegal hunting (firearm/chemical/snaring)
 - o Pseudo/legal hunting/trophy hunting (international hunters)
 - o Permit violations
 - o TOPS violations
- Health and Medicines Act violations
- SA Civil Aviation Authority violations
- Corruption
- Fraud
- Money laundering
- Racketeering
- International transgression of the CITES Convention on the trade in rhino
- Customs regulations

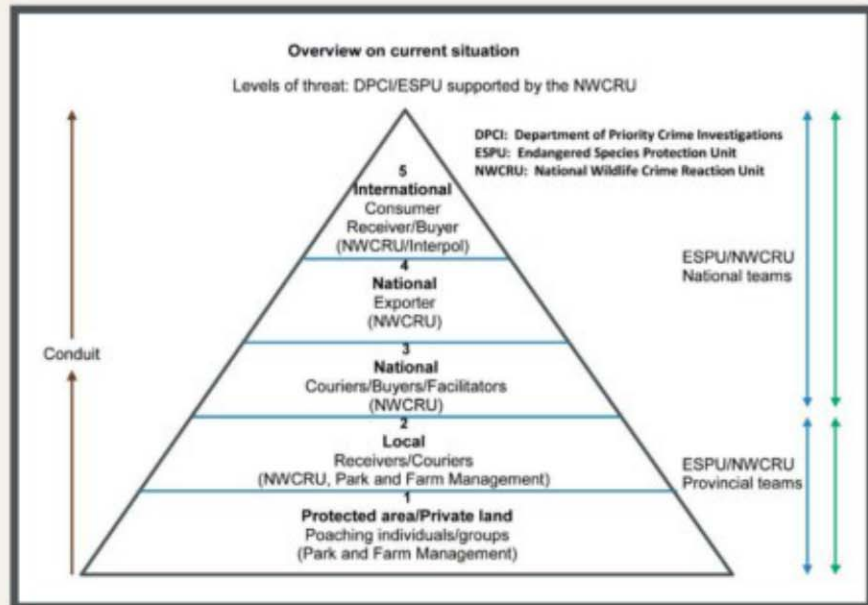
b) Rhino industry involvement (individuals/organisations)

The rhino industry environment requiring specific attention is generally made up of the following components:

- o Rhino owners
- o Hunting outfitters
- o Professional hunters
- o Taxidermies
- o Veterinarians
- o Game captures
- o Game dealers or agents
- o Permits and permitting systems
- o Rhino population distribution and numbers
- o Rhino horn stock piles and security
- o Linkages between the provincial, national and international industry

c) Modus operandi

The modus operandi used locally



and internationally in the illegal killing of rhino and the smuggling of their horns clearly indicates increasing involvement of highly organised and well-structured crime syndicates operating a lucrative international enterprise. A number of modi operandi are used to conduct these criminal activities and the poachers use these to corrupt the legal systems and officials.

d) Levels and tactics

Levels

The basic levels of the value chain:

- Level 1 - Poaching conducted by individuals/groups
- Level 2 - Local receivers/couriers
- Level 3 - National buyers/couriers/facilitators
- Level 4 - National receivers/exporters
- Level 5 - International receivers/buyers/end-user

High-level and lower-level tactics

- o High-level tactics:
 - Mozambique joint cross-broader operational support is key to reducing threats in KNP and SA.
 - Well-established linkages to other areas of organised crime.
 - High-risk criminal activities being re-directed to "less risk" rhino-related crime.
 - Well-organised and "slick" conduit

from crime scene (level 1) to exporter (level 4).

Highly mobile – intra- and inter-provincial.

Targeting of rhino horn stockpiles. Sophistication of methodology and equipment.

Unlimited funding mechanisms.

- o Lower-level tactics:

Local knowledge and experience in communities and target area being exploited.

Larger poaching group size (up to six individuals).

Well armed – multiple firearms, AK47 and heavy calibre firearms.

Sophistication of equipment.

Good communications.

Highly mobile.

Increasing aggressive behaviour.

High remuneration for poacher level.

Immediate payment to poacher on exchange of horns.

Dominant the night – make use of favourable moon phases (full moon).

Aims and objectives of authorities against rhino poaching

- Reduce the number of rhino illegally hunted.
- Reduce the rate of rhino poaching group incursions.
- Transnational assistance and cooperation with neighbour countries.

- Building partnerships with the private sector.
- Disrupt and reduce the rhino poaching and rhino smuggling activities on all levels.
- Create awareness of the extent of the current activities relating to rhino poaching and rhino horn smuggling.

Strategies in combating the illicit wildlife trade

- Carry out comprehensive information and intelligence evaluation and threat analysis profiles of suspected rhino poaching groups.
- Prioritise rhino poaching suspects for levels 1 to 5 according to information availability and targeting profiles.
- Plan and execute extensive and extended joint operations to target all identified and prioritised suspects to achieve the following:

- Arrest of active rhino poaching suspects.
- Evidence linkages to incidents.
- Recovery of firearms used in poaching activities.
- Disruption of poaching groups and activities.
- Intelligence building.
- Facilitating efficient and effective joint operations with other country counterparts.

Various SA initiatives against rhino poaching

DNA and forensic programme:

- The collection of a DNA profile of all rhino, rhino horns and any rhino derivatives and the management of the DNA rhino data bank of southern Africa.
- The role-out of the DNA programme to other countries.
- The establishment of an African Wildlife Forensic capacity in South Africa.

NATJOINTS:

- The multi-dimensional approach by all government departments to work together from national level to provincial level to fight against rhino poaching.


Stop Rhino Poaching:

- Stop Rhino Poaching is an awareness programme driven by 94.2 Jacaranda to assist the fight against rhino poaching.

LEAD SA:

- LEAD SA is an awareness programme driven by the private sector to assist in stopping rhino poaching.

Conserv:

- Conserv is a community policing initiative where all members are in SMS connection with the latest incidences and call-out for assistance. 



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