

FRANCE: On 28 April 2014, Customs officials seized 70 live Spur-thighed Tortoises *Testudo graeca* (CITES II/Annex A) from a vehicle disembarking from a ferry arriving at the port of Sète from Nador, Morocco. The animals, were concealed in two bags in the vehicle's engine compartment. The driver was reportedly on his way to Belgium.

French Government Customs: bit.ly/1oGQgon (in French), 7 May 2014

INDIA: On 1 August 2014, Customs officials at Chennai airport detained a man who was attempting to smuggle 88 Black Pond Turtles *Geoclemys hamiltonii* (CITES I and Schedule I protected species in India) to Bangkok, Thailand. The suspect, who had placed the specimens in his bag underneath clothing, was handed over to forest officials. The turtles, which were examined by a veterinarian, are to be kept in a unit at Velachery, before being handed over to the children's park in Guindy.

The New Indian Express, bit.ly/Z9HJV, 3 August 2014

PAKISTAN: On 20 September 2014, at Karachi airport, authorities foiled an attempt to smuggle to Thailand more than 218 Black Pond Turtles *Geoclemys hamiltonii* (CITES I). The reptiles, one of which had perished, were found in the luggage of a man who had boarded a flight to Bangkok after arriving from Lahore; he was removed from the aircraft and taken into custody. The reptiles are being kept at the Indus Dolphin Centre in Sukkur and are to be released into the wild.

Two hundred Black Pond Turtles smuggled out of Sindh to China were confiscated by Chinese authorities last month. Two Pakistanis and five Chinese poachers were held. The turtles were later handed over to the Pakistani authorities.

bit.ly/1viPCRG, 21 September 2014

PHILIPPINES: On 6 May 2014, authorities seized 555 marine turtles from a vessel off Palawan Island, including Hawksbill Turtles *Eretmochelys imbricata* and Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* (both CITES I). The turtles had reportedly been fished by Filipino fishermen and delivered to the Chinese vessel. Eleven arrests. A local fishing boat was apprehended at the same time with 70 turtles on board.

On The Trail No. 5, Robin des Bois, 29 July 2014

UK: On 9 July 2014, 12 critically endangered Bahamian Rock Iguanas *Cyclura rileyi* sp. (CITES I) were repatriated to their native Bahamas following the seizure, at Heathrow Airport, by officers of the United Kingdom Border force in February. Of the 13 specimens seized, one had died and three more perished following repatriation. In April, two Romanian women were each sentenced in the UK to 12 months' imprisonment (see *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 26(1):25).

Officers from Border Force's specialist CITES team worked with the Bahamas High Commission in London to arrange for repatriation of the iguanas and IAG Cargo arranged for their complimentary carriage: special dispensation was given to carry them in the main cabin of the aircraft. The animals were initially rehabilitated at the Gerace Research

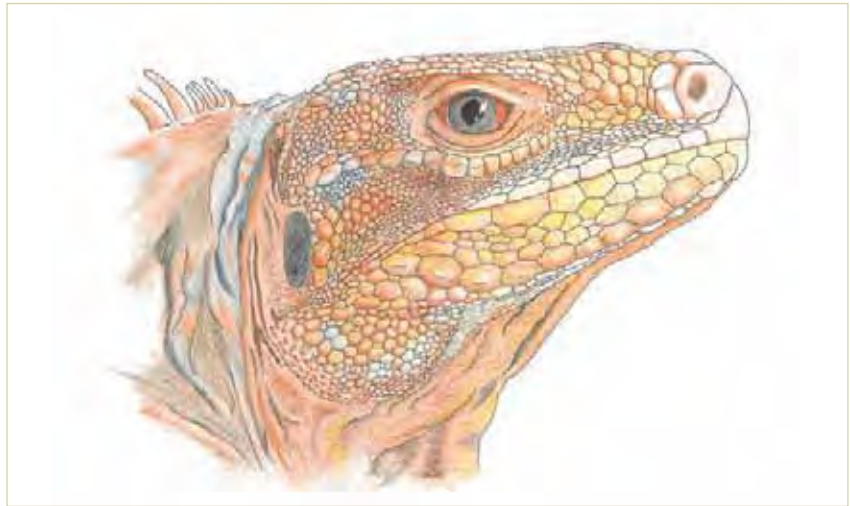


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN BENDON

Center in San Salvador before being released in Moriah Harbour Cay National Park in Exuma.

bit.ly/1mYIZoC, 11 July 2014; bit.ly/1BDhSRj, 25 September 2014

RHINOCEROSSES

INDIA: On 18 July 2014, in Kaziranga National Park, forest guards found the carcass of an adult male Great Indian Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* (CITES I) that had been killed by poachers and the horn removed. Empty cartridges and ammunition were found at the spot. It was reported that the total number of rhinoceroses killed by poachers in the park had gone up to 21 this year to date.

India Times: bit.ly/1rlaquo, 19 July 2014

MOZAMBIQUE: On 16 May 2014, at Mtubatuba Regional Court, KwaZulu-Natal, Antonio Sendes Langa of Mozambique was gaoled for eight years for killing a White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* (CITES I) in Imfolozi Game Reserve in September 2013.

iol news: bit.ly/1yByGRm, 19 May 2014

SOUTH AFRICA: On 22 May 2014, three Chinese nationals were arrested in Gauteng for possession of and dealing in rhinoceros horn, whilst six suspected poachers were arrested in the surrounding areas just outside Kruger National Park (KNP), and a further two arrested and two fatally wounded inside the park.

On 27 May 2014, a former SANParks ranger and two policemen based at Skukuza police station in KNP were arrested for alleged involvement in rhinoceros poaching. Park rangers and officers of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (known as the Hawks) came across a Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* (CITES I) carcass during a routine patrol. Acting on information, the team pulled a marked police van over and found inside a person suspected of being a poacher, armed with a hunting rifle and ammunition. Both policemen face charges of corruption and the suspected poacher is facing charges of being in possession of unlicensed firearms and ammunition. In another operation on the same

▲ *Cyclura rileyi cristata* from White Cay, Exumas, Bahamas.

THE SAN SALVADOR ROCK IGUANA consists of three subspecies: *Cyclura rileyi rileyi* from San Salvador cays; *C.r. nuchalis* from Bush Hill Cay in the Exumas; and *C.r. cristata* from White (Sandy) Cay in the Exumas, the subspecies that was smuggled to the UK (see text). This animal (listed as Critically Endangered, B1+2e, C2b in the IUCN Red List) is probably the rarest of all the Rock Iguanas and may be the rarest iguana in the world. Numbers may have been decimated by raccoons which will catch and eat iguanas; the footprints of one raccoon were observed on White Cay in 1996 but the animal has since been confirmed dead. At that time, the count of *C.r. cristata* specimens was about 180 individuals and over the years has ranged from between 100 and 200 specimens. Latest sightings put the current figure as very low, maybe fewer than 100. Some individuals have been offered for sale in Europe as "captive bred" but as no permission has ever been granted for their export, they could not be of legal origin. Subsequent to this smuggling incident, the Bahamian authorities have said that two more shipments of unidentified Appendix-I Bahamian *Cyclura* sp. iguanas have taken place this year.

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day, rangers at Pretoriuskop came across a group of suspected poachers; during the encounter, one of the suspects was fatally wounded and the remaining two managed to escape. Poaching equipment, a hunting rifle and ammunition were recovered during the operation.

On 9 June 2014, Hawks personnel reported that two men had been arrested in connection with the theft in April of rhinoceros horns from Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency, near Johannesburg. They had cut into a strong box and made off with 112 pieces of rhinoceros horn (80 kg), the first known theft of its kind. Most of the horns, which have not been recovered, were from dehorning operations undertaken by local authorities. A third suspect was arrested on 24 June.

On 23 June 2014, at Naphuno Regional Court, Limpopo, Hlengani Reckson Mathebula and Erick Mathebula, both of Mozambique, were each sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for rhinoceros poaching. The Hawks arrested the men after a shoot-out between a group of poachers and KNP rangers in February last year. Three poachers were shot dead while the two managed to escape. They were tracked down and arrested in Lulekani and Phalaborwa, respectively. Each was in possession of a fresh rhinoceros horn when arrested.

On 8 July 2014, at Nelspruit Regional Court, Mozambicans Joseph Ephraim Bila and Ndombama Salvatore Nkuna were each sentenced to 16 years in gaol for their involvement in killing a White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* (CITES I) (10 years for killing and dehorning the animal; four years for trespassing and carrying out a restricted activity in a restricted area, and six years for illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition). The 10- and four-year sentences would run concurrently. The pair, arrested by rangers in KNP in April last year, pleaded guilty to the charges.

On 23 July 2014, at Nelspruit Magistrates' Court, Mandla Chauke was sentenced to 77 years in gaol on charges relating to the hunting of three rhinoceroses in KNP in 2011. Chauke and two others had just shot a rhinoceros bull, a cow, and a calf when discovered by rangers in the park; the cow and calf were badly wounded and the adult bull was killed. A shoot-out ensued and Chauke and one other man were wounded. The third man escaped and was still at large. The wounded man died in hospital. Chauke was sentenced to 15 years for the murder of his accomplice, eight years for theft of horns, 15 years for illegal possession of a firearm, seven years for illegal possession of ammunition, two years for trespassing, and 10 years each for illegally hunting each rhinoceros.

On 19 September 2014, the Hawks arrested the alleged kingpin of one of South Africa's biggest and most violent rhinoceros poaching syndicates; nine other members of the syndicate were arrested in various parts of the country as part of an operation that has been under way for a year; another member handed himself over to police. The arrest took place in front of Pretoria North Magistrates' Court where the suspect was due to appear on firearms charges. He is accused of obtaining 84 rhinoceros horns via illegal means.

The syndicate is believed to be responsible for the killing of 24 rhinoceroses in State and privately owned reserves around the country between June 2008 and June 2012. Of the poached animals, 22 were darted; the other two were shot. Only two animals survived the attacks. The syndicate operated in the Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North-West, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State. It is alleged that members obtained up to 84 rhinoceros horns by poaching, as well as stealing the horns and obtaining them in other illegal ways: 41 of the horns were taken from 24 poached animals; 14 horns were stolen; 29 were obtained by other means. The 10 suspects were due to appear in Hatfield Court in Pretoria on 29 September.

On 21 September 2014, three SANParks workers were arrested for alleged rhinoceros poaching in KNP after reportedly being found with a hunting rifle, ammunition, vehicle and poaching equipment shortly after the discovery of a freshly killed rhinoceros in the area where they worked.

On 25 September 2014, Chumlong Lemthongthai, a Thai national, had his sentence for illegal trade in rhinoceros horn reduced from 30 to 13 years by the Supreme Court of Appeal (SCA). The judge said the sentence was too severe and disproportionate when compared to the minimum sentences statutorily prescribed for other serious offences. However, he stipulated that Lemthongthai had to pay a R1 million (USD89 000) fine or his sentence would be extended by five years.

Lemthongthai was arrested in 2011 after organizing illegal rhinoceros poaching expeditions having obtained 26 permits from the environmental affairs department to conduct rhinoceros trophy hunts (see *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 25(1):34); he then unlawfully used Customs documents in an attempt to export the horns. He was sentenced to 40 years' imprisonment by a regional magistrate; however after taking the matter to the High Court in Pretoria, Lemthongthai had the sentence reduced to 30 years. He subsequently approached the SCA, arguing a non-custodial sentence would be better suited in his case, but this request was turned down.

www.politicsweb.co.za, 28 May 2014; *Reuters Africa*: bit.ly/1rlamlu, 9 June 2014; *SABC*: bit.ly/1qdr0uO, 25 June 2014; *The Citizen*: bit.ly/1sBtchq, 24 June 2014; <http://bit.ly/VGtyEZ>, 8 July 2014; *iol news*: <http://bit.ly/1vDYvXu>, 23 July 2014; *The Citizen*: <http://bit.ly/1mkVpai>, 19 September 2014; bit.ly/1qtrbwK, 22 September 2014; <http://bit.ly/10iwx8R>, 26 September 2014

USA: On 27 May 2014, at Newark federal court, Zhifei Li, the owner of an antique business in Shandong, China, received a 70-month gaol term—one of the longest sentences to be imposed in the USA for a wildlife smuggling offence—for his role in trafficking 30 rhinoceros horns and rhinoceros horn (and elephant ivory) artefacts from the USA to China. He was also ordered to serve two years of supervised release and to forfeit USD3.5 million of the proceeds from his criminal activity.

TRAFFIC: <http://bit.ly/1iuLhUD>, 28 May 2014

FLORA

INDIA: Red Sandalwood (Red Sanders) *Pterocarpus santalinus* (CITES II), selected seizures:

23 April 2014: 8.5 t from containers in Irugur, Coimbatore. 18 arrests.

28 May 2014: at Walajapet station, Vellore, 757 kg of logs from a vehicle smuggled from the reserve forest area in Andhra Pradesh via Tiruvallur, bound for Tiruvannamalai. One arrest.

Over three weeks in June 2014, Chennai port: 60 t from seven containers, some of which were recalled from overseas ports in China, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Dubai.

8 June 2014: four tonnes being loaded onto a container lorry at a nursery near Madhavaram at Moola Chatiram Main Road, Chennai. Seven arrests.

27 June 2014: 287 kg at Palasa railway station, Andhra Pradesh. The driver fled but was later arrested and taken into custody.

4 July 2014: 15 t from a godown in Nadiad town, Kheda district, Gujarat.

3 August 2014: four tonnes from a vehicle in Ambattur Estate, Chennai.

4 August 2014: 400 kg in Muttathara, Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala, during raids on five houses; four arrests. The wood, which included carvings, was reportedly from Marayur, Aryanad and Kulathupuzha in Kerala and from Karnataka.

New Indian Express: bit.ly/YWEmzW, 15 May 2014; <http://bit.ly/1viWCy2>, 29 May 2014; *The Times of India*, bit.ly/T1xuy6, 22 June 2014; *New Indian Express*: bit.ly/1uGQQK5, 9 June 2014; *The New Indian Express*, bit.ly/1uj1Rj8, 27 June 2014; *Business Standard*: bit.ly/1mtTA9S, 4 July 2014; *The Times of India*: <http://bit.ly/1orc7mr>, 4 August 2014; *The New Indian Express*, bit.ly/1trfwPd, 5 August 2014

THAILAND: On 31 May 2014, police acting on information that a large number of rosewood *Dalbergia* logs had been concealed in a village pending their sale to foreign buyers, seized about 3000 illegally cut rosewood logs at the village in Khun Han district, Si Sa Ket province, close to the border with Cambodia.

Bangkok Post, <http://bit.ly/1r81QbR>, 31 May 2014

USA: On 17 September 2014, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources Law Enforcement displayed during a press conference what they revealed to be the largest seizure of illegally harvested American Ginseng *Panax quinquefolius* (CITES II) in the State's history. Approximately 86 kg of the root had been seized in Wyoming, McDowell, Fayette and Raleigh counties before 1 September, when the ginseng season officially began. Any digging, possession or selling of ginseng before that date is a criminal offence. Eleven arrests have been made and more were likely to follow, it was reported.

Officers confirmed that many prescription drug dealers will buy the ginseng, which is