

## SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS

groups rapidly united and sent veterinarians and additional manpower, supplies and funds to the Philippines. The Director of Katala's Foundation's Philippine Freshwater Turtle Conservation Program, Dr Sabine Schoppe, and her small team found a temporary location at the Palawan Wildlife Rescue and Conservation Center to manage and triage the confiscation and created suitable makeshift ponds. Some 2828 turtles have been released to date and after an initial peak of deaths in the first days, very few further deaths had occurred. Approximately 505 turtles remained in poor condition at the time of the report and had been started on a treatment regime.

*Turtle Conservancy:* <http://bit.ly/1GpDSHN>, 29 June 2015

**SPAIN:** On 15 July 2015, it was reported that some 40 Spur-thighed Tortoises *Testudo graeca* (CITES II) that had been left in crates, apparently abandoned in the street in Malaguete, Malaga, were seized by the authorities. The specimens were to be examined with the aim of returning them to the wild.

*Spanish News Today:* [http://spanishnewstoday.com/endedangered-native-spanish-tortoises-dumped-in-m%C3%A1laga\\_21848-a.htm#VabOuNoaySN](http://spanishnewstoday.com/endedangered-native-spanish-tortoises-dumped-in-m%C3%A1laga_21848-a.htm#VabOuNoaySN), 15 July 2015

**TAIWAN:** On 16 July 2015, Tainan Coast Guard officials seized a total of 3876 turtles, including 2286 Chinese Box Turtles *Cuora flavomarginata* and 920 Yellow Pond Turtles *Mauremys mutica* (both CITES II), 469 Reeves' Turtles *Mauremys reevesii* (IUCN Endangered), and one Keeled Box Turtle *Coura mouhotii* (IUCN Endangered). The specimens were believed to be bound for mainland China.

*Yam News:* <http://bit.ly/1W4kWQK>, (in Chinese), 18 July 2015

## RHINOCEROSSES

All species and populations of Rhinocerotidae are listed in CITES Appendix I except the South African and Swaziland populations of *Ceratotherium simum simum* which are listed in CITES Appendix II.

See also under **Other/Multi-seizures**

**CZECH REPUBLIC:** On 19 June 2015, at Prague 6 district court, three Vietnamese nationals were convicted of the illegal export of rhinoceros horns; two received gaol terms of five years and the third to three years after they were caught trying to export to Viet Nam the horns (6.7 kg) of a rhinoceros hunted by a Czech hunter in South Africa. The consignment was seized at Václav Havel Airport in December 2013 following a routine x-ray baggage check; the horns had been concealed under layers of resin, plastic wrap and tar in a parcel containing electrical insulation material.

*Prague Post:* <http://bit.ly/1G9AqC>, 19 June 2015

**HONG KONG:** On 27 July 2015, at the freight delivery centre at Hong Kong International Airport, Customs officers seized 10 pieces of suspected rhinoceros horns (6.71 kg) in three express parcels mixed with wood products. Each item had been wrapped in foil and plastic sheets. The parcels had arrived on different flights on 26 and 27 July from Pemba, Mozambique, via Johannesburg, South Africa. The slabs were suspected to have been cut from two whole horns, and believed to be intended for delivery in separate consignments to evade detection. The case was handed over to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department for follow-up action.

*Hong Kong Customs press release:* <http://bit.ly/1RWaz0H>, 29 July 2015

**INDIA:** On 1 May 2015, Gohpur police in Biswanath police district apprehended nine rhinoceros poachers at several locations in Gohpur and Bandardewa, among them an Arunachal police inspector. One rhinoceros horn was recovered.

*www.assamtribune.com/scripts/detailsnew.asp?id=may0215lat054*, 2 May 2015

**KENYA:** On 23 May 2015, at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi, a Vietnamese citizen in transit to Ha Noi, was arrested for smuggling seven pieces of rhinoceros horn, rhinoceros tails and Lion *Panthera leo* (CITES II) teeth (total 12 kg) out of Maputo, Mozambique.

*http://en.starafrika.com/news/kenya-nabs-vietnamese-for-alleged-rhino-horn-smuggling.html*, 25 May 2015

**MOZAMBIQUE:** On 3 May 2015, police in central Maputo seized 4.6 kg of rhinoceros horn and large sums of foreign currency from two Mozambicans and two South Koreans resident in South Africa and believed to be part of an international ring of traffickers in rhinoceros horn. The items were found in a car the group was using.

*http://allafrica.com/stories/201505060127.html*, 5 May 2015

It is reported that 12 of 65 rhinoceros horns seized in early May 2015 were stolen from a police strongroom in Matulo, Maputo province, on 22 May. A number of arrests have been made in connection with the latest theft. Mozambican police confirmed on 2 June that four individuals detained in connection with the theft of the 12 rhinoceros horns are senior police officers. The 65 horns and 340 elephant tusks (1.1 t) were found at a house on the outskirts of Maputo.

The seizure was originally heralded as a significant breakthrough in international efforts to clamp down on the criminal syndicates behind rhinoceros poaching and the smuggling of horn from Africa to Asia, although considerable confusion still exists over the number and nationality of people arrested in connection with the record bust. However, news of the police strong-room theft represents a serious setback in efforts to follow up the seizure with significant investigations that could help break a major trafficking network.

"TRAFFIC again urges Mozambique to seek the assistance of INTERPOL in providing the specialist support needed when significant seizures are made, to ensure that vital law enforcement opportunities are not squandered," said Tom Milliken, TRAFFIC's Elephant and Rhino Programme Leader. "Mozambique should share with INTERPOL all evidence relating either to the original seizure or the subsequent theft."

The theft is a significant blow to the newly elected government, which has publicly signalled its intent to address the country's poor law enforcement record and corruption.

"While there are encouraging signs that the political will exists to get to grips with the corruption and crime that is undermining Mozambican society, this latest law enforcement lapse will come as a huge setback. Mozambique now has an opportunity to act on its stated commitments to stamp out corruption and demonstrate to the world that it is serious about tackling wildlife crimes, but a failure to do so will result in a serious loss of credibility for the new government," said Milliken.

*TRAFFIC:* <http://bit.ly/1MEd5UU>, 15 May 2015; <http://bit.ly/1ZXv7LH>, 1 June 2015; *News Ghana:* <http://bit.ly/1GTayVO>, 2 June 2015

**SOUTH AFRICA:** On 6 May 2015, four members of Middelburg Flying Squad Unit were arrested in Mpumalanga. The constables had allegedly seized a rhinoceros horn and cash from a vehicle that they had stopped while on duty. Instead of arresting the five occupants, they reportedly demanded a bribe for the horn's release. The five suspects handed themselves over to members of the Organised Crime Unit in Middleburg and provided details of the event. A subsequent sting operation led to the arrest of the four constables and seizure of the horn.

*Sowetan Live:* [www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2015/05/08/four-cops-arrested-for-possession-of-rhino-horn-corruption](http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2015/05/08/four-cops-arrested-for-possession-of-rhino-horn-corruption), 8 May 2015

On 31 August 2015, at White River Magistrates' Court, Mpumalanga, Mozambican nationals Phinias Sithole and France Nkuna, were convicted and each sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment after being arrested in Kruger National Park on 27 October 2014, armed with a hunting rifle and an axe. They were sentenced to five years in gaol for possession of an unlicensed firearm, five years in gaol for unlawful possession of ammunition and one year in gaol for trespassing.

"This conviction will serve as a deterrent to other would-be poachers; they will know that the task teams will stop them in their tracks even before committing the crime," said national police spokesperson, Brigadier Vishnu Naidoo.

*MY Lowveld:* <http://bit.ly/1MTnfW2>, 3 September 2015

**USA:** On 20 May 2015, in a federal court in Florida, Christopher Hayes, the President and owner of an auction house was sentenced to 36 months in gaol followed by two years of supervised release for his role in the purchase,

sale and smuggling of rhinoceros horns and objects made from rhinoceros horn, elephant ivory and coral that were smuggled from the USA to China. Hayes' corporation, Elite Estate Buyers Inc., located in Florida, was ordered to pay a USD1.5 million fine to the Lacey Act reward fund. The court also banned the corporation from trading wildlife during a five-year term of probation.

Hayes and his company reportedly sold six horns of Black Rhinoceroses *Diceros bicornis* (CITES I); two of the horns were sold to Ning Qiu, a Texas resident who was involved in smuggling the horns to China. Qiu pleaded guilty to being part of a broader conspiracy to smuggle rhinoceros horns and items made from rhinoceros horns to Zhifei Li, the owner of an antiques business in China and the ringleader of a criminal enterprise that smuggled 30 rhinoceros horns and objects made from rhinoceros horn and elephant ivory from the USA to China. Qiu was sentenced to 25 months in gaol on 14 May 2015, in Frisco, Texas, and Li to a gaol term of 70 months in New Jersey in June 2014.

Elite and Hayes also admitted selling items made from rhinoceros horn, elephant ivory and coral to the president of an antiques business in Canada, who they then directed to a local shipper who agreed to post the items in Canada without the required permits. That individual, Xiao Ju Guan, was sentenced to 30 months in gaol on 25 March 2015 in New York.

The prosecution of Elite and Hayes is part of Operation Crash, a continuing effort by the Special Investigations Unit for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement, in co-ordination with the Department of Justice to detect, deter and prosecute those engaged in the illegal killing of rhinoceroses and the unlawful trafficking of rhinoceros horns and elephant ivory.

US Department of Justice: <http://1.usa.gov/1M6RWIG>, 20 May 2015

**VIET NAM:** On 11 May 2015, police in Nghe An seized 31 rhinoceros horns (37 kg) and arrested two men as they disembarked from a railway station with the horns concealed in three bags. During questioning, one of the suspects confessed that he had been hired to transport the consignment from Ho Chi Minh City to Nghe An. The case is under investigation.

Thanhni News (Viet Nam): <http://bit.ly/1NnH4TP>, 10 May 2015

## FLORA

**Red Sandalwood (also known as Red Sanders) *Pterocarpus santalinus* is listed in CITES Appendix II.**

**HONG KONG SAR:** On 9 July 2015, Customs officials at the Kwai Chung Customhouse Cargo Examination Compound seized a container holding 10 600 kg of logs of suspected Red Sandalwood from a container arriving from India by sea. The shipment was declared as "glass flower pots".

On 22 September 2015, Customs officials and marine police seized 446 kg of suspected Red Sandalwood being loaded by four people onto speedboats at Tsam Chuk Wan, Sai Kung. The suspects fled on one of the boats. The case is under investigation.

Hong Kong Customs press releases: <http://bit.ly/1LEJ7NA>, 9 July 2015; <http://bit.ly/1NnHzgT>, 22 September 2015

**INDIA:** It was reported on 4 September 2015, that some 13 000 t of Red Sanders had been seized in Andhra Pradesh, 12 573 cases had been booked, 7354 vehicles seized and 19 852 people arrested for involvement in the illegal cutting and transportation of Red Sanders in the State, according to the State's Minister for Forests, Environment, Science and Technology in a written reply to a question in the AP assembly. The reporting period was not specified. The reply stated that 12 armed mobile teams and 19 observation posts with 40 CCTV cameras had been deployed. A special task force has been established to curb organized Red Sanders smuggling and an amendment to the AP Forest Act 1967 was also proposed as a deterrent against illegal cutting and smuggling of Red Sanders trees, the reply stated.

Business Standard: <http://bit.ly/1PAi9jhl>, 4 September 2015

In early May 2015, 20 t of Red Sanders was seized from a container in Korampallam, Tuticorin.

On 12 May 2015, 2700 kg of Red Sanders was seized from a lorry on Jharsa Chowk flyover, Gurgaon, after police, acting on information, put up barricades. Four suspects, who were arrested, had brought the wood from Khushkhera in Rajasthan, destined for a warehouse in Delhi.

On 16 May 2015, two policemen in Kadapa District were suspended for alleged dereliction of duty in connection with the theft of 18 Red Sanders logs from the premises of a police station in Vontimitta town. Three other policemen from Sambepalli police station were also suspended for alleged involvement in the smuggling of Red Sanders. The trio reportedly had supported the smugglers in transporting the logs from Dudyala and Yerramorampalli.

On 19 May 2015: a police constable in Kalamboli was arrested for allegedly conspiring with smugglers and abetting the crime; he is being held in custody. Four others were arrested. The case relates to an incident on 6 April 2015, when a container loaded with 7.5 t of smuggled Red Sanders arrived from Tamil Nadu and was delivered to a warehouse in Kalamboli steel market. The contraband, which was to be exported, had been sent from Tamil Nadu by a man, who is still at large.

On 28 May 2015, police in Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh, arrested 72 people and confiscated 77 logs weighing 1.5 t. The smugglers had tried to dupe the police by disguising themselves as a marriage party. Woodcutter blades and axes were seized, together with 77 logs being transported on a bus. On 5 June 2015, it was reported that a Chinese suspect detained for smuggling Red Sanders had told police that large quantities of Red Sanders are being sent to Dubai, mainly by sea.

On 29 June 2015, the anti-poaching flying squad of the Tirupati Wildlife Division seized more than a tonne of Red Sanders logs in Devarakonda in the Chamala range of the Seshachalam hills after they came across a group loading logs into vehicles; there were several arrests, though a number of people fled.

On 14 July 2015, Kadapa district police arrested a timber merchant and alleged international Red Sanders smuggler in Navrangpur village in Gurgaon district of Haryana, Kadapa. The suspect is accused in two cases relating to Red Sanders smuggling in Obulavaripalle and Pedlimarri police stations. Information leading to his arrest was provided by three recently-arrested Red Sanders smugglers. The accused are reported to have smuggled nearly 120 t of Red Sanders logs out of the country to Dubai, Nepal and China.

On 17 August 2015, three alleged smugglers were arrested and 2 t of Red Sanders (122 logs) recovered by Red Sanders Anti-Smuggling Task Force officers. The suspects were reportedly associates of a known international Red Sanders smuggler. Their modus operandi involved procuring the wood from other smugglers, transporting it as waste paper, fruit and vegetables, and supplying the logs to smugglers in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Delhi and other northern States of the country with links to international smugglers.

[www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/3-red-sanders-smugglers-held-logs-worth-over-rs-2-cr-seized-115081700839\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/3-red-sanders-smugglers-held-logs-worth-over-rs-2-cr-seized-115081700839_1.html), 17 August 2015; <http://bit.ly/1jTz21>, 2 May 2015; Times of India, 14 May 2015: <http://bit.ly/1Fi5ziN>; Deccan Herald: <http://bit.ly/1LnPj8g>, 16 May 2015; Times of India: <http://bit.ly/1W5AicS>, 24 May 2015; The New Indian Express: <http://bit.ly/1W4edGe>, 30 May 2015; The Hindu: [www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/dubai-a-thriving-hub-of-red-sanders-smuggling/article7284277.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/dubai-a-thriving-hub-of-red-sanders-smuggling/article7284277.ece), 5 June 2015; [www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/rs-2-cr-worth-red-sanders-logs-seized-smugglers-held/article7368517.ece](http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/rs-2-cr-worth-red-sanders-logs-seized-smugglers-held/article7368517.ece), 30 June 2015; The New Indian Express: <http://bit.ly/1PAaWzK>, 19 July 2015

## OTHER / MULTI-SEIZURES

Operation COBRA III, the biggest ever co-ordinated international law enforcement operation targeting the illegal trade in endangered species, has led to the recovery of a huge amount of wildlife contraband, including over 12 t of elephant ivory and at least 119 rhinoceros horns.

European seizures included 11 439 dead and live specimens, almost 2000 parts and products, and over 6 t of timber, plants and animal parts. In addition, 100 000 pills of traditional Asian medicine were confiscated. Several individuals have been arrested and investigations are continuing in many countries.

Conducted in two phases between mid-March and the end of May 2015, Operation Cobra saw the participation of law enforcement teams and agencies from 62 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and America. The operation was organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF), and supported by numerous international agencies and organizations such as Europol and INTERPOL.

Europol: <http://bit.ly/1RnVPqo>, 18 June 2015

**BANGLADESH:** On 6 September 2015, skins and body parts of Bengal Tigers *Panthera tigris tigris* (CITES I) and other wildlife products were seized at Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Market in Gulshan-2. A raid of a leather shop at the market yielded skulls of a Tiger and Fishing Cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* (CITES II), skins of Tiger, deer and snake, animal bones and a further 20 bags and belts made from skins of Tiger, snake, Fishing Cat and monitor lizards *Varanus* spp. (CITES I/II). The shopkeepers reportedly escaped.

[www.thedailystar.net/backpage/tiger-skins-body-parts-seized-139138](http://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/tiger-skins-body-parts-seized-139138), 7 September 2015

**CHINA:** In April 2015, Shangluo police, Shanxi Province, spent six months investigating and subsequently arresting 50 suspects from more than 20 provinces and cities; some 1000 national first-class protected animals were seized. The first arrested suspects were Liu Liang, Gou Yu and Wang Xiao who were respectively sentenced to five years, 10

years and three years in gaol (suspended for five years) and fined CNY20 000 (USD3000), CNY15 000 and CNY10 000.

On 3 July 2015, border police at Jimunai, Xinjiang, found packages of Chinese Caterpillar Fungus *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* (15.66 kg), the skin of a bear *Ursus* (CITES I) and 35 bear paws concealed in a car. The driver confessed that a Kazakhstan national had paid him to transport the items to China.

On 7 August 2015, at Yuwang district court, Kaifeng city, a Mr Li was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, suspended for four years and fined CNY20 000 (USD3000). This follows his arrest in 2014 when forest police raided his shop in Kaifeng city and seized 68 ivory pieces (1.5 kg) (CITES I), one piece of Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica* (CITES II) horn and one piece of Helmeted Hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil* (CITES I) product.

On 18 August 2015, it was reported that the former director of Liupanshui Zoo, Guizhou province, Mr Yin, had been sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment and fined CNY100 000 (USD15 700) for purchasing five Francois' Langur *T. francoisi* (CITES I) from local hunters. Mr Yang and Mr Zhao during 2011 and 2014. Mr Zhao was given a 15-years prison sentence, and fined CNY150 000 (USD23 565) for hunting, transporting and selling three monkeys; Mr Yang was given a 10-year prison sentence and fined CNY50 000 (USD7800) for hunting and selling two monkeys.

China Wildlife Conservation Association: <http://bit.ly/1PAj2bx>, 10 July 2015 [in Chinese]; [www.jisi.gov.cn/News/szsm/xinj/201507/20150713111641\\_13679.html](http://www.jisi.gov.cn/News/szsm/xinj/201507/20150713111641_13679.html), 13 July 2015; [www.cwca.org.cn/news/tidings/ff808081471ed293014f05a4215150e8.html](http://www.cwca.org.cn/news/tidings/ff808081471ed293014f05a4215150e8.html), 7 August 2015 [in Chinese]; [www.cwca.org.cn/news/tidings/ff808081471ed293014f488ef10f534f.html](http://www.cwca.org.cn/news/tidings/ff808081471ed293014f488ef10f534f.html), 20 August 2015

**UGANDA:** A woman arrested with the skin of a Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* (CITES I), antelope horns, skins of Serval *Leptailurus serval* (CITES II), python (CITES I/II) skin and other contraband has been sentenced to 1.5 years in gaol and fined USD280.

*The Eagle network*, August 2015

**VIET NAM:** The port of Da Nang has been the entry point into the country for a number of shipments involving elephant, rhinoceros and pangolin products in recent months, in sharp contrast to previous ivory seizures that have taken place in either Hai Phong port or Mong Cai province, further north in the country.

On 13 August, Customs at Tien Sa port, Da Nang, seized a shipment of almost 600 kg of elephant ivory and 142 kg of rhinoceros horns declared by a local company as marble and imported from Mozambique.

This was followed by a seizure on 21 August of over 2 t of ivory inside a container full of timber from Nigeria. The recipient of this shipment was the same as the one on 13 August. On 25 August, Customs in Da Nang seized 1023 kg of tusks and over 4 t of pangolin scales that reportedly arrived from Malaysia. The tusks were hidden among sacks of beans in a shipment weighing nearly 20 t. The confiscation of a large amount of ivory, pangolin scales and rhinoceros horn by authorities shows the vigilance of Viet Nam Customs. However, it is worrying as it also points to Da Nang as a new port of entry for illegal wildlife trade in Viet Nam.

"With ivory and other wildlife smuggling at the forefront of global attention and enforcement efforts, traffickers are constantly exploring new routes and ports to exploit in the movement of illicit goods. The seizures in Da Nang are a perfect illustration of this," said Madelon Willemsen, TRAFFIC's Head of Office in Viet Nam.

"Although some ivory processing in Viet Nam does take place and may actually be increasing, the evidence suggests that most of the raw ivory imported into Viet Nam is re-exported to China using land routes over the terrestrial border in the far north. Thus, trafficking through Da Nang represents increased transport costs as it is much further away from the Chinese border than the port of Hai Phong where most seizures of transit trade in the past occurred," said Tom Milliken, TRAFFIC's Elephant and Rhino Programme Leader.

[www.traffic.org/home/2015/9/24/spotlight-on-da-nang-as-new-conduit-in-global-ivory-traffic.html](http://www.traffic.org/home/2015/9/24/spotlight-on-da-nang-as-new-conduit-in-global-ivory-traffic.html), 24 September 2015

Seizures undertaken in numerous countries during Operation Cobra III, conducted between March and May 2015, led to the recovery of shipments containing (below, left to right) ivory, plants and coral in Italy, Sweden and Poland, respectively.

