

Mapping the crime

EIA map indicates the scale and nature of rhino horn trade

As part of a series of visualisations of the illegal wildlife trade, London-based NGO the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) recently released an interactive map of the illegal trade in rhino horn. The map gives an instant insight into the scale of the trade and the nature of the transnational crime networks behind the rhino poaching crisis.

Environmental Investigation Agency

The map includes incidents of seizures and thefts of rhino horn over the past decade, along with convictions relating to the rhino horn trade.

EIA collected the data from publicly available sources, including government reports, enforcement agency press releases, and news media in several languages – although it is not an exhaustive data set and likely represents only a fraction of the actual activity for 2006–16.

In order to present the data in a striking and informative way, EIA used the mapping software CARTO to create an interactive world map. On the EIA website, you can zoom in to click on specific incidents, which will bring up information including the number of horns seized, reported origin and destination of the shipment, transit method, and any related convictions.



The map shows that:

- Approximately 2,947 kg of horn, equivalent to around 1,060 individual horns, has been seized in a total of 357 incidents in the period 2006 to June 2016. This represents a mere fraction of the actual level of illegal trade in rhino horn
- At least 267 horns have been stolen from museums, government-held stockpiles and private homes; these were likely trafficked onto the black market
- Few seizures have been openly reported as resulting in convictions

You can find the interactive rhino horn map, along with others covering ivory, tigers and other Asian big cats, pangolins, and helmeted hornbill on the EIA website: eia-international.org/category/maps

Data collected by EIA suggests a high degree of involvement of Vietnamese and Chinese nationals across the rhino horn trade, and the map shows that nationals of both countries have been arrested in rhino range states, transit countries and consumer countries during the past decade. For example, in March 2014 three Chinese nationals were arrested at Windhoek Airport in Namibia in possession of 14 horns; a fourth was arrested in May 2015. Vietnamese nationals have been arrested in several African countries, including two arrested in October 2014 in Johannesburg in possession of 41 kg of horn, as well as transit countries such as Qatar, Singapore and the Czech Republic. Overall, EIA's records document the seizure of 887 kg of rhino horn that was explicitly linked to Viet Nam (30% of total seizures), and 695 kg that was explicitly linked to China (24% of total).

An animated time-lapse version of the rhino map, also viewable on the EIA website, clearly highlights major trends in the rhino horn trade over the past decade. The animation shows the emergence first of China and soon after of Viet Nam as centres of rhino horn seizures, along with a major concentration in South Africa, particularly around Johannesburg and Kruger National Park.

The time-lapse also illustrates the more recent rise of seizures in Namibia and other African countries, along with the escalation of trade in rhino horn in India, which poses a great threat to the small and highly vulnerable remaining populations of greater one-horned rhino.

These conclusions are also reflected in a report submitted by IUCN and TRAFFIC to the CITES Secretariat in advance of the 17th Conference of the Parties meeting in September 2016. The report notes the involvement of Vietnamese and Chinese nationals across the rhino horn trade, and recommends that Parties consider adding China to the list of 'countries of priority attention' for rhino horn. At CITES, a proposal submitted by Swaziland to allow it to sell rhino horn was rejected by a significant majority. EIA recommends that the global focus now be on intelligence-led enforcement to tackle the organised criminal networks responsible for the poaching crisis.

EIA welcomes any additional information or updates on the status of rhino horn cases, and the dataset is available for research and analysis. Please contact charlottedavies@eia-international.org with any information or requests.

EIA is an international non-governmental organisation committed to combating environmental crime and advocating for effective criminal justice responses to tackle such crime. Since its establishment in 1984, EIA has played a key role in contributing to international and national decision-making in relation to combating environmental crimes such as illegal wildlife trade.