



ROBIN DES BOIS

ON the TRAIL

Information and analysis bulletin on animal poaching and smuggling
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Introduction

The traffickers' tricks beginning of this year:

Rhino horns chopped in bits threaded into frozen lobsters' heads.

Rhino horns inside wooden statuettes of Buddha.

Tips of elephant tusks made up as buffalo horns.

Freshwater turtles hidden with mangrove crabs.

Ivories and pangolins declared as telephone equipment to repair.

Sea turtles shells declared as "oval and marbled sculptures".

Pygmy frogs and pythons in children's books and cigarettes packet.

Illegal ivories declared as instant noodles.

Ivory objects concealed in powdered milk cans.

Sections of elephant tusks in the middle of wine bottles.

False CITES certificates accompanying geckos and butterflies.

Seahorses and pangolin scales in bags of medical plaster.

0.5 ton of ivory in 1 ton of shea butter.

Paint a leopard skin as a tiger skin.

Paint a goatskin as a tiger skin.

Caravan of 5 couriers on the same flight conveying 500 turtles.

Teaching philosophy at university and having a second life as an ivory and rhino horn dealer.

Rhinos and Elephants

AFRICA

GANG

Arrest of a gangster involved in the poaching of elephants and rhinoceroses¹

Near Simiyu, Tanzania

January 5, 2015

Businessman is a very vague term. The businessman is the man whose profession, declared or not, is to do business and make a profit. Importation, exportation, extortion are often among the modus operandi of businessmen and businesswomen. Some are specialized, others multi-skilled. That's the case of John Njile, a businessman from Bariada (population 40,000) who, with a gang at his disposal, robbed restaurants, grocery stores, shops, cell-phone stores and... the reserves sheltering pachyderms with tusks and horns.

Mister John is 46 and trigger happy. During a night of secret hunting for elephants and rhinos in the reserve of Maswa, coupled with Serengeti National Park (751 km²) and sought after by international hunters to shoot zebras and buffalo, he also killed one of his accomplices. It wasn't a hunting accident. Mr. John does his business with his automatic weapon. He was arrested on January 5.

Seizure of 29 elephant tusks (300 kg), 2 rhinoceros horns and a giraffe tail²

Katombora, Matabeleland North Province, Zimbabwe

February 22, 2015

As part of a joint operation, Zambian and Zimbabwean authorities are conducting an investigation on the murder of 2 rhinos, a mother and her little one, and horn theft in the Save Valley Conservancy. 12 Zambian poachers near Zambezi National Park were tracked down. They fled, abandoning their encampment. No arrest was made, but \$ 50,000 US of ivory was found on-site.



AMERICA

Appearance for rhino horns and elephant tusks smuggling³

State of Florida, United States of America

January 2015

Elite Estate Buyers, a Florida auction house, and its director Christopher Hayes are on the radar screen of Operation Crash (cf. "On the Trail" n°1, 3, 5, and 6). Hayes is accused of having planned the escape of 6 black rhino horns, ivory and coral objects. Elite purportedly helped foreign traffickers forge certificates and other documents to US Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. customs. Elite in particular had an ongoing relationship with a Texan resident, a key link in horn trafficking to China. Elite sold him 2 horns for \$80,500 US, with over \$ 15,000 US in commissions. The horns that Elite sold to outlaw exporters in China are valued at \$ 400,000 US. In 2012 alone, Elite organized 6 auctions of horns, ivory, and coral.

Hayes pleaded guilty. Hayes revelations to the investigators about the smuggling network toward China earned him a reduced sentence of only 3 months probation. The fine was hefty. Elite must pay \$ 1.5 million US.

Elite is one of the oldest auction houses in the United States of America. Elite's Facebook page offers giant elephant tusks and rhinoceros horn libation cups for sale. Elite says that these items were brought to the territory of the United States over 100 years ago, a dating opening the doors to commercialization.

Conviction for trafficking of rhinoceros horn, elephant ivory and coral⁴

New York, State of New York, United States of America

March 25, 2015

2.5 years of imprisonment without remission for Xiao Ju Guan (cf. "On the Trail" n°6, p. 107 and "On the Trail" n°7, p. 72) also known as Tony Guan. The man who called himself an "antique dealer" in British Columbia illegally exported carved ivory from the United States. He pleaded guilty for trafficking in ivory, and in rhinoceros horns and coral. The Canadian police also found 50,000 pills of ecstasy in his shed. A New York court issued the sentence.



Arrest for rhinoceros horn and elephant ivory trafficking⁵

St. Cloud, State of Minnesota, United States of America

March 31, 2015



The philosophy professor, specialist of the French writer Jean-Paul Sartre and of Chinese religions was also a horn, libation cup, and ivory trafficker. Yiwei Zheng's double life is disturbing for St. Cloud State University. His passport was confiscated and he was released on bail

for \$ 25,000 US. He will be able to resume teaching, until his trial and his imprisonment without remission—the usual sentence that American courts issue for ivory and rhinoceros horn traffickers.

Via eBay and his online business called "Crouching Tiger Antiques", Zheng is accused of introducing and exporting carved ivory and other antiques made of rhinoceros horn to and from the United States of America, between 2006 and 2011. Summing up the situation, the prosecutor Laura Provinzino said that such activities feed into the black market and thus threaten vulnerable animal species. "On the Trail" notices how Zheng bought a libation cup at the renowned auction house Christie's, in Paris. He then illegally had it sent from France to the United States

via FedEx. This is just one of his offenses. Zheng was in contact with his accomplices of Chinese origin. They also lived in the United States or were in transit. He sold his suspicious "antiques" to them. The 2 rhinoceros horn transactions took place in a McDonald's in St. Cloud/ Minnesota.

EUROPE

Seizure of an ivory Christ crucifix, an elephant tusk section and 3 rhinoceros horns⁶

Milan Malpensa Airport, Lombardy Region, Italy
March 2015

The Chinese citizen was going back home.



All together for the elephants

37 European African, American and Asian NGOs wrote on January 20, 2015 to Mrs. Royal, Ecology Minister in France asking her to ban any trade and export from France of raw ivory in the shape of tusks or cut tusks (cf. "On the trail" No. 7p. 95). Auctions of post-colonial ivory are increasing in France. The high quotation rate of ivory brings out elephant ghosts from attics. On 28 January 2015, Ms Royal has in a first measure suspended sine die export of raw ivory. France hopes that every European country take the same initiative like Germany, Austria, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. This encouraging position is however not sufficient.



On March 7, Cannes Auction sold 500 kg of raw elephant tusks. Potential customers were informed by auctioneers they could circumvent the French legal decision by getting an export certificate outside the European Union in Belgium using the bad offices of Art on the Move based in Brussels and specialized in transport and logistics for "works of art". Most tusks were bought by a young Asian man.

Cannes Auction used the CITES logo in watermark in its catalog. Informed by Robin des Bois (Robin Hood), the CITES Secretariat expressed dissatisfaction with the French Ministry of Ecology. An unannounced visit of Customs the eve of the auction registered 17 breaches of CITES regulations on animal parts other than raw elephant tusks. The details of these particular offenses relating to crocodylians, turtles and carved ivory has not been revealed yet.



To block the maneuvers of Cannes auctions or other auction houses in France and Europe, a letter signed by 41 NGOs was sent on March 23 to the competent authorities in all European countries asking them to suspend in turn export of raw ivory from their territory. The aim of these NGOs is to lead to the complete closure of the export from the European Union. In the absence of response, 21 countries were contacted again on April 23 by Robin des Bois, coordinator for this campaign. The Ministers responsible for the implementation of CITES in France, Germany, Austria, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden have also written to this effect to their European counterparts.



On March 30, the Dupont and associated auction house in Morlaix, Brittany region in western France, intended to auction "3 tusks of the last elephants of Senegal, taken from poached elephants." Catalog stressed "the high historical and scientific value of these tusks belonging to the last elephants in Niokolo-Koba Nature Park". Pictures and descriptions of the tusks were accompanied by the following statement: "Regarding the export from the European Union, the future buyer will have to learn about the legal restrictions in particular in France, which now prohibits any re-export outside the European Union". Attentive to the calls of Robin des Bois and many other NGOs and their supporters, the Dupont house has withdrawn from their auctions all elephant tusks expressing the wish not to be confused with the Cannes Auction "rascals".

On April 13, a letter coordinated by WildAid in Hong Kong and Robin des Bois in Paris signed by 52 international NGOs asked the Secretary for the Environment of Hong Kong to suspend all import and export of raw tusks. Hong Kong imported 206 elephant tusks for the single year 2013, including 191 from the European Union. The letter emphasizes the complementarity of the suspension of export from the European Union and of the suspension of import and export in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

"Such a step would reduce the trafficker's room for maneuver and will facilitate the control of the legality of ivory in the numerous retail shops in Hong Kong."



* WildAid Hong Kong, Robin des Bois France, ADM Capital Foundation Hong Kong, Amboseli Trust for Elephant Kenya, Animals Asia Foundation Hong Kong, Animal Defenders International United Kingdom, Aqua-Meridian (ACE Foundation) Hong Kong, Association pour la Protection des Animaux Sauvages (ASPAS) France, Awely Des animaux et des hommes France, Born Free Foundation United Kingdom, Born Free USA, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Kenya, The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation United Kingdom, EAGLE Network (Eco Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement) Cameroun, Eastern Caribbean Coalition for Environmental Awareness (ECCEA) Dominica, Ecovision Hong Kong, ElephantVoices Norway / USA, Elephant Action League USA, Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) United Kingdom, Ecologie sans frontière France, Energy Saving & Environment Concern Alliance (ESECA) Hong Kong, Fondation 30 Millions d'Amis France, Fondation Brigitte Bardot France, Fondation Franz Weber Switzerland, Friends of the Elephant (Vrienden van de Olifant) Netherlands, Greenpeace East Asia Hong Kong, Greensense Hong Kong, Humane Society International USA, Humane Society of Canada, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), Institut Jane Goodall France, Jane Goodall Institute China, Jane Goodall Institute Hong Kong, L214 France, Ligue pour la Protection des Oiseaux France, Lilongwe Wildlife Trust Malawi, Mille Traces France, OSCAP (Outraged South African Citizens Against Rhino Poaching) South Africa, PETA Asia Pacific Hong Kong, Performing Animal Welfare Society USA, Prowildlife Germany, Rettet die Elefanten Afrikas e.V Germany, Save The Elephants Kingdom / Kenya, Sens Afrique Solidaire France, Species Survival Network (SSN), SOS Elephants Chad, Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Hong Kong, WILDAFRICA Save African Animals Czech Republic, Wildlife At Risk International (WAR) Netherlands, Wildlife Friends Foundation Thailand, Wildlife Friends International Netherlands, WildLifeRisk Hong Kong, WWF Hong Kong.

Letter available at : <http://www.robindesbois.org/english/animal/Common-letter-Hong-Kong.compressed.pdf>