

Cambodia's increasing role in the African ivory and rhinoceros horn trade

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Tackling the current African Elephant and rhinoceros poaching crisis is an urgent need (Sutherland *et al.*, 2014) and a major focus of conservation effort and political will. Particular efforts have been aimed at combating the transcontinental trafficking of ivory and rhinoceros horn from Africa to Asia. Effective law enforcement requires understanding and identifying key trafficking pinch points—the weak links connecting sources of ivory and rhinoceros horn in central, eastern, and southern Africa with the markets for high-value wildlife products in Asia, particularly those in China and Viet Nam (Ayling, 2013).

Since 2011, there have been at least 15 seizures of African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* ivory and six seizures of African rhinoceros horn in Cambodia, whilst 24 ivory and rhinoceros horn seizures have occurred in other countries which reported Cambodia as part of the illicit trade chain (Table 1). Most recently, in September 2017, 1.35 t of ivory was seized in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, arriving from Benin, bound for Cambodia via Cat Lai Port, and on 11 October, eight rhinoceros horns (weight not reported) were seized at Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok, from two Chinese nationals reportedly in transit from Zambia to Cambodia.

This trade amounted to nearly 13 t of ivory and at least 124 kg of rhinoceros horn, with the greatest quantities of ivory seized reported in 2016. As a consequence, Cambodia was identified as a “country of secondary concern” in the analysis of illegal ivory trade presented by the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) to the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP17) in 2016 (Milliken *et al.*, 2016). Cambodia's emerging role in the rhinoceros horn trade was also noted at the meeting. Cambodia has also been included in the Convention's intersessional National Ivory Action Plan (NIAP) process since 2014 to address a range of issues associated with illegal trade in ivory.

Most consignments seized by Cambodian authorities have occurred at the country's two international airports: in Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital city, and Siem Reap, gateway to the country's major tourist attraction, Angkor Wat (Table 2). The most recent seizure of rhinoceros horn was in November 2016 and involved over 35 kg of horn—the single largest volume of rhinoceros horn seized in Cambodia (Down and Phan, 2016). The seized ivory and rhinoceros horn came from at least six African countries (Angola, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda) and passed through a number of regional aviation hubs in Africa, the Middle East and Asia (Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Doha, Dubai, Singapore, Seoul) before arriving in Cambodia.

In addition, in August 2016 and in May 2014, two large ivory seizures were made at the international port of Preah Sihanoukville, Cambodia's only deep water port. These involved, respectively, over 600 kg of raw ivory shipped from Mozambique hidden in a consignment of corn, and more than 3000 kg coming from Kenya via Malaysia in a shipment of beans. In 2016, more than one tonne of raw ivory destined for this port was seized in Kenya's port of Mombasa prior to export and, in 2011, nearly three tonnes of ivory was seized in Kenya and in Malaysia from Kenya, in two separate seizures, before reaching Preah Sihanoukville. Most recently, in December 2016, more than 1300 kg of elephant tusks, 10 large cat skulls, 82 kg of carnivore bones and 137 kg of pangolin *Manis* spp. scales were seized from Phnom Penh Dry Docks, hidden in hollowed-out timber shipped from Mozambique.

The bulk of the trade in which suspects have been identified has involved Vietnamese nationals—both in the seizures made in Cambodia and those made elsewhere but involving Cambodia in the trade chain (Table 3). In addition, in April 2017, police in Hanoi arrested three alleged members of a Vietnamese wildlife trafficking ring and seized a large amount of illegal products,

SEIZED IN CAMBODIA						SEIZED OUT OF CAMBODIA				
Year	ELEPHANT IVORY		RHINOCEROS HORN			ELEPHANT IVORY		RHINOCEROS HORN		
	No. of seizures	Kg of seizures	No. of seizures	No. of horns	Kg of seizures	No. of seizures	Kg of seizures	No. of seizures	No. of horns	Kg of seizures
2017						1	1.356	2	8	>36.00
2016	2	1975.20	2	26	39.78	3	2326.00	0	0	0
2015	1	46.10	0	0	0	4	440.64	1	3	9.40
2014	5	3415.30	0	0	0	5	941.09	0	0	0
2013	7	264.60	3	13	21.50	2	156.10	0	0	0
2012	0	0	1	6	17.90	2	72.17	0	0	0
2011	0	0	0	0	0	4	2879.86	0	0	0
Total	15	5701.20	6	45	79.18	21	6817.216	3	11	>45.40

Table 1. African Elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn seized in, going to, or coming from Cambodia, 2011–mid October 2017.

Place of seizure	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	Total
Phnom Penh International Airport	2	-	1	5	1	-	9
Siem Reap International Airport	-	1	1	5	-	-	7
Preah Sihanoukville sea port	1	-	1	-	-	-	2
Phnom Penh dry docks	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Viet Nam border	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Other	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	4	1	5	10	1	0	21

Table 2. Location and number of seizures in Cambodia, 2011–2016.

including 36 kg of rhinoceros horn that reportedly came from Cambodia. There have been no reported seizures of African wildlife products at Cambodia's borders in 2017 at the time of going to press (October 2017).

The data presented here suggest that Cambodia may be emerging as a transit hub for the illegal transcontinental trafficking of high-value wildlife products. Cambodia's long and extremely porous borders with Viet Nam and Lao PDR make transporting wildlife products out of the country towards demand markets elsewhere in Asia relatively easy. Stronger enforcement, stricter penalties, and chances of detection at other entry points to Asia, particularly Bangkok, may have facilitated the emergence of Cambodia as a low-risk trafficking route.

Whilst there is little direct demand for rhinoceros horn or ivory in Cambodia from Cambodian nationals, there is evidence that shops and hotels in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, catering principally to Chinese nationals on package trips, are increasingly selling carved ivory products (T. Gray, pers. obs., 2017; Trang and Frechette, 2017). This development, which may be exacerbated by changes to the legality of ivory markets in Thailand and China, requires greater vigilance.

Given the potential important role of Cambodia in transcontinental trafficking of African rhinoceros horn and ivory, a robust response by government law enforcement agencies and the global conservation community is required. Increased forensic analysis and improved criminal investigative capacity is required, whilst it is recommended that penalties for the possession and trade of non-native IUCN Threatened or CITES Appendix I species in the country are strengthened.

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Year	2017		2016		2015		2014		2013		2012		2011		Total
Country of nationality of suspects	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	SZ	
	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	IN	OUT	
Cambodia					1		2								3
China		1	2				1	2							6
Viet Nam		1			1	2	1	3	10	1	1	1			21
Other														1	1
Unknown			2	4	2		3		1		1		3		16
Total	2	2	4	4	1	5	5	7	10	2	1	2	0	4	48

Table 3. Seizures of African Elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn involving Cambodia in the trade chain, and the country of nationality of suspects, 2011–mid October 2017.

SZ In = a seizure made in Cambodia; SZ Out = a seizure made elsewhere but involving Cambodia in the trade chain.