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TRAFFIC

B U L L E T I N



OCTOBER 2018

OTTER PELT SEIZURES IN NEPAL

REPTILE PET MARKET IN JAPAN

MEDICINAL USE OF PRIMATES IN BENIN

The journal of TRAFFIC disseminates information on the trade in wild animal and plant resources

The *TRAFFIC Bulletin* is a publication of TRAFFIC, a leading non-governmental organisation working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

The *TRAFFIC Bulletin* publishes information and original papers on the subject of trade in wildlife, and strives to be a source of accurate and objective information.

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NIGERIA: On 1 August 2018, it was reported that authorities had seized from a shop in Oba Elegushi international market, Ajah, some one tonne of pangolin scales (and four pieces of elephant tusks (29 kg)). The occupants of the shop are at large. Three other pangolin seizures took place in early 2018 (see also *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 30(1):32), all reportedly involving Chinese nationals.

Oracle Today: <https://bit.ly/2ysRAJo> [undated]; *Africa Sustainable Conservation News:* <https://bit.ly/2AoMq2N>, 15 August 2018

VIET NAM: On 27 April 2018, Customs officials in Cat Lai port, Ho Chi Minh City, seized 3.8 t of pangolin scales from two containers imported from Congo declared as logs. This is reported to be the largest-ever seizure of animal parts by Ho Chi Minh City Customs. The authorities were alerted to the shipment by Congolese Customs and had been monitoring the containers since their arrival from a transit port in Singapore. Scanners revealed suspicious empty spaces at the centre of each container, surrounded by logs. As no recipient came to claim the consignment, officials opened it up on 1 June to discover the full contents.

On 3 May 2018, at Saigon Port, Ho Chi Minh City, authorities seized 3.3 t of pangolin scales in transit from Nigeria bound for Cambodia in a shipment of cashew nuts (see also Other/multi-seizures).

Tuoi Tre News: <https://bit.ly/2w7mtEP>, 27 April 2018; *Viet Nam.net:* <https://bit.ly/2JbOmI4>, 4 May 2018

ZIMBABWE: On 11 April 2018, in Masvingo, Zimbabwe nationals Brighton Ngwenyama, Tatenda Mhango and Kudzai Shava were each sentenced to the mandatory nine years in prison for possession of a pangolin (CITES I). Police received information in April 2016 that the trio was selling a pangolin at a location near Mushandike and posed as buyers. After being offered the live pangolin for sale, they asked the three to place the animal in the car while the payment was being processed. Other detectives moved in and arrested the suspects; Shava tried to flee, but was shot in the leg.

The Herald: <https://bit.ly/2AnbpTZ>, 11 April 2018

REPTILES

INDIA: On 4 August 2018, some 1,125 Indian Star Tortoises *Geochelone elegans* (CITES II) concealed in cloth bags were seized from three passengers travelling by train from Vijayawada; they were arrested at Visakhapatnam railway station, Andhra Pradesh. The reptiles were reportedly to be passed over to an accomplice in Howrah before being smuggled to Bangladesh.

On 6 September 2018, authorities seized 523 Indian Star Tortoises from a passenger

at Lokmanya Tilak railway station who was arrested.

On 6 October 2018, authorities acting on information seized 584 Indian Star Tortoises and arrested two persons at Triplicane, Chennai, breaking up an inter-state gang operating in Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh (AP). The tortoises were reportedly destined for export and had been brought from AP for onward transportation through Tamil Nadu.

NDTV: <https://bit.ly/2ODkiBD>, 6 August 2018; *Zee News:* <https://bit.ly/2CxxOQ4>, 6 September 2018; *The Business Standard:* <https://bit.ly/2yQaRUw>, 6 October 2018

INDONESIA: In September 2018, Jakarta police arrested a man in Tangerang, Banten, for his involvement in the illegal trade in and possession of 128 Pig-nosed Turtles *Carettochelys insculpta* (CITES II). The turtles were being traded illegally via social media.

The Jakarta Post: <https://bit.ly/2S7W40o>, 28 September 2018

SPAIN: In August 2018, it was reported that authorities in Mallorca had shut down what has been described as the largest illegal turtle hatchery in Europe, and seized 1,110 turtles and tortoises of 62 species, including Radiated Tortoises *Astrochelys radiata* (CITES I) and box turtles (CITES II) and species endemic to Mexico, USA, and Canada. The farm was not registered with the CITES Secretariat as required for the commercial breeding of CITES species. Three people were arrested and more arrests are expected.

National Geographic: <https://on.natgeo.com/2R-749RA>, 23 August 2018

USA: On 23 July 2018, Chinese nationals Huaqian Qu and Renfeng Gao were fined USD5,500 (to be paid to the US Fish and Wildlife Service) and were ordered to return to China within 72 hours after they attempted to smuggle 31 Spotted Turtles *Clemmys guttata* (CITES II) and 14 box turtles *Terrapene* spp. in carry-on bags on a flight from Los Angeles to China without the requisite CITES permits. Flight attendants Qu and Gao were arrested at Los Angeles International Airport on 12 May 2018.

San Bernardino Sun: <https://bit.ly/2qIsexU>, 21 June 2018; *Whittier Daily News:* <https://bit.ly/2AmNpAp>, 23 July 2018; *Newsweek:* <https://bit.ly/2PdMISc>, 11 October 2018

VIET NAM: On 20 September 2018, it was reported that the People's Court of Dien Bien district, Dien Bien province, had sentenced Cao Xuan Nai to 10 years in prison after he was found guilty of violating wildlife regulations. He was arrested near the Tay Trang Border Gate in April 2018 with 27 (10.5 kg) Big-headed Turtles *Platysternon megacephalum* (CITES I) and four Asian Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* (CITES I)

paws. The arrest was processed over three months, after the revised 2015 Penal Code had taken effect, which raises the maximum penalty for wildlife-related violations for individuals to 15 years or VND2 billion (USD85,900) in fines.

Viet Nam Plus: <https://bit.ly/2CX6ED3>, 20 September 2018

RHINOCEROSSES

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

CHINA: As part of a nationwide investigation into wildlife crime code-named "Operation Thunder", which was launched on 1 April 2018, authorities in Yunnan province uncovered a network selling illegal wildlife products online and seized 53 rhino horn pieces.

On 3 July 2018, authorities seized 5.5 kg of rhino horns and 121 suspected rhino products (273 kg) in Chongzuo, Guangxi province. Four suspects were transporting the items to the border city of Pingxiang in two vehicles, reportedly en route from Africa to Viet Nam. The suspects were apprehended following investigations undertaken by multiple police forces in Pingxiang City, Longzhou County, Guangxi and Xia Shizhi (see also Other/multi-seizures).

China News: <https://bit.ly/2PNX7K> (in Chinese), 8 May 2018; *Legal Daily:* <https://bit.ly/2ysFTcw> (in Chinese), 23 July 2018

MALAYSIA: On 13 August 2018, authorities at Kuala Lumpur International Airport discovered 50 rhino horns at a postal aviation centre in what is believed to be South-east Asia's largest single seizure of rhino horns. The horns were packed in boxes that also contained nine whole carnivore carcasses, all bound for Ha Noi, Viet Nam; their provenance is not reported.

<https://bit.ly/2Pe8I4Y>, 18 August 2018

MOZAMBIQUE: On 7 October 2018, at Maputo International Airport, a Chinese citizen bound for Viet Nam was detained after nine rhino horns wrapped in aluminium foil and mixed with food products were found in his luggage.

Club of Mozambique: <https://bit.ly/2y9HxJ4>, 8 October 2018

SOUTH AFRICA: On 7 May 2018, at Lephale Regional Court, Limpopo, Antonio Xavier Freitas was fined R1 million (USD72,000) or sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Freitas was charged with hunting specially protected animals without a permit, possession/donation of rhino parts without a permit, and selling rhino meat without a permit.

On 17 May 2018 at the Zeerust Regional Court, four people accused of rhino poaching received prison sentences of between 10 and 30 years. The accused entered Madikwe Game Reserve on 29 March 2017 and allegedly killed a rhino; they abandoned their vehicle and fled on foot after being pursued by the authorities. Their vehicle was found to contain two rhino horns, a rifle, and knives. The suspects were arrested in Winterveldt near Soshanguve on 4 April 2017. Patrick Khoza and Samuel Masive were each sentenced to 30 years in prison; Johannes Mthopa was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and Monda Ndlovu to 20 years.

On 31 May 2018, at Cape Town Regional Court, Alexandre Dias Shintlhangu was gaoled for five years for attempted rhino poaching. He was found guilty of: conspiracy to commit a crime by attempting to kill a rhino in Karoo National Park (five years' imprisonment); entering, residing and hunting in a national park without authorisation (five years' imprisonment); possession of a firearm (five years' imprisonment) and possession of ammunition without a licence (three years' imprisonment). All four counts will run concurrently.

The case relates to an incident in August 2017 when three men allegedly from a rhino poaching syndicate in Limpopo province illegally entered Karoo National Park, Western Cape, with the intention of killing a Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis bicornis* (CITES I) for its horns. They gained entry by cutting a hole in the electrified fence. Discovering the hole, field rangers tracked the spoor of the suspects and arrested Shintlhangu; the other two fled (one was later arrested in Vaalwater but charges were withdrawn pending DNA results). Poaching equipment was recovered.

On 2 August 2018, at Saselamani Magistrates' Court, Limpopo, Joseph Molapo and Sebastian Mbhombhi were sentenced to 15 years and six months' imprisonment following their arrest in Kruger National Park in October 2014. They were sentenced to four years for rhino poaching; six months for trespassing; eight years and three years respectively for possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition.

On 18 September 2018, six key syndicate members implicated in the trafficking of poached rhino horns were arrested in various locations in Mpumalanga. Included among them were two alleged syndicate leaders, two police officers and a former policeman; another police officer was arrested on 20 September.

The arrests relate to an investigation, Project Broadbill, which is focused on the criminal supply chain of poached rhinos within Kruger National Park, Kwazulu Natal, Gauteng and other private or state-owned reserves. The syndicate members allegedly ran poaching groups with the support of corrupt police officials as well as authorities from private game farms. More seizures and arrests are expected.

On 20 September 2018, authorities conducting a raid on a property in Standerton, Mpumalanga,

seized 20 rhino horns as well as firearms and ammunition. Two people were arrested.

Capricorn Voice: <https://bit.ly/2O2Klx6>, 9 May 2018; *South African Police Service media statement*: <https://bit.ly/2Cw74PU>, 18 May 2018; *South African National Parks*: <https://bit.ly/2NWREej>, 27 June 2018; *The Citizen*: <https://bit.ly/2JadsxA>, 27 June 2018; *South African Police Service media statement*: <http://bit.ly/2Saoffl>, 2 August 2018; *South African Police Service media statement*: <http://bit.ly/2PmFyLH>, 19 September 2018; *News24*: <http://bit.ly/2q4XCve>, 20 September 2018; *South African Police Service media release*: <http://bit.ly/2PmFyLH>, 21 September 2018

TURKEY: On 7 August 2018, Customs officials at Atatürk Airport, Istanbul, seized nine rhino horns from luggage arriving from South Africa and belonging to a passenger who had left the airport without collecting his luggage. The horns were detected by x-ray machine.

Hurriyet Daily News: <http://bit.ly/2yTJDMV>, 8 August 2018

VIET NAM: On 24 May 2018, Lao Cai City police discovered more than 20 kg of rhino horns being illegally transported in a car from Vinh Phuc to Lao Cai. The pieces had been wrapped in black bags and concealed in vases of hyacinths that were destined for sale to China. Two arrests.

On 15 July 2018, authorities at Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City, seized 12 rhino horns (7 kg) from luggage belonging to a Vietnamese man arriving from Angola. The horns were concealed in cans of milk powder.

RFA: <http://bit.ly/2NVLM0d>, 25 May 2018; *TUOITRE.VN*: <http://bit.ly/2EFEoqt>, 13 July 2018; <http://bit.ly/2PON7rt>, 17 July 2018

ZIMBABWE: On 11 July 2018, in Masvingo, Godfrey Makechemu, Ignatius Maiga, Farai Chauno and Celestino Shate were each sentenced to nine years' imprisonment after being convicted of unlawfully hunting rhinos and for the illegal possession of a firearm and silencing device. The defendants shot and wounded a male Black Rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* (CITES I) in the Save Valley Conservancy, in Bikita, in December 2017. The rhino escaped, bleeding heavily.

The suspects were picked up after rangers on patrol discovered rhino spoor and traces of blood alongside human footprints and lay in wait for the suspects after tracking the spoor.

NewsDzeZimbabwe: <http://bit.ly/2PkkMvQ>, 21 July 2018; *Nehanda Radio*: <http://bit.ly/2Jb8C2X>, 11 July 2018

OTHER / MULTI-SEIZURES

During May 2018, an international operation codenamed Thunderstorm initiated by INTERPOL and involving intergovernmental

organisations, police, Customs, and wildlife agencies in some 92 countries, resulted in nearly 2,000 wildlife seizures and the identification of some 1,400 suspects. Further arrests and prosecutions are foreseen. Total worldwide seizures reported during May include: 43 t of wild meat (including bear, elephant, crocodile, whale and zebra); 1.3 t of raw/processed ivory; 869 alligators/crocodiles, 9,590 turtles and 10,000 snakes; some 4,000 birds; several tonnes of timber; 48 live primates; 14 big cats; the carcasses of seven bears; eight tonnes of pangolin scales including almost four tonnes by Vietnamese maritime authorities on board a ship arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see also Marine and Pangolins).

INTERPOL: <http://bit.ly/2S9CTTS>, 20 June 2018

ANGOLA: On 4 June 2018, police handed over to the Environment Ministry 60 African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* (CITES I) tusks (262 kg) and 266 kg of pangolin *Manis* (CITES I) scales that had been seized at Luanda's Quatro de Fevereiro International Airport. The remaining amount [undisclosed] was in France in the possession of INTERPOL. Seven Angolan citizens were reportedly aiming to trade the ivory in the United Arab Emirates.

On 22 August 2018, five Vietnamese nationals were arrested in São Paulo district and the following were seized: 535 kg of raw ivory, 263 kg of worked ivory, 895 kg of pangolin scales and 10 kg of CITES-listed medicinal plants. Two workshops had been set up in a residential property to work the ivory. Of the four detainees, two were reportedly preparing to travel to Viet Nam with suitcases containing 20 kg of rhino horns concealed in packs of toys, lamps and fruit.

The case was triggered when another Vietnamese citizen was detained on 12 May; he had reportedly been intending to board a flight from Luanda International Airport on 4 February with 20 kg of rhino horn (see also Elephants and Pangolins).

Angola CITES Management Authority in litt. to *ETIS*, 25 August 2018; *allAfrica*: <http://bit.ly/2AnPts5>, 21 June 2018; *Observador*: <http://bit.ly/2NYHUv8>, 23 August 2018

CAMEROON: On 6 April 2018, at Douala International Airport, one tonne of pangolin scales and an unconfirmed number of elephant tusks were seized from containers of cocoa that were to be transported to China. The country of origin was being investigated. Three Chinese nationals were arrested (see also Elephants and Pangolins).

Voice of America (VOA): <http://bit.ly/2EMITke>, 13 April 2018

CHINA: On 26 March 2018, Jilin forest police uncovered a chain of illegal purchasing and sale of wildlife; 18 people were arrested and 26 rhino horns and 110 ivory products were seized (see also Elephants and Rhinoceroses).