

# ON<sub>the</sub> TRAIL

The defaunation bulletin  
n°39. Events from the 1<sup>st</sup> January to the 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023



Quarterly information and analysis report on endangered  
animals poaching and smuggling  
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# ON<sub>the</sub> TRAIL

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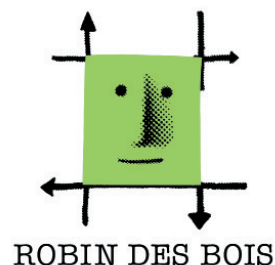
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# NOTE AND ADVICE TO READERS

"On the Trail", the defaunation magazine, aims to get out of the drip of daily news and to draw up every three months an organized and analyzed survey of poaching, smuggling and worldwide market of animal species protected by national laws and international conventions. "On the Trail" also relates ongoing trials and the evolution of regulations and sanctions.

- A single event may refer to several species (e.g. simultaneous seizure of ivory, bear bile and snake skins); it is then analysed in the "Multi-species" chapter, with the exception of events that bring together the following species and which have their own chapter:
  - Pangolins + elephants + rhinos + felines
  - Elephants + felines
  - Rhinos + felines
  - Marine and freshwater multispecies (simultaneous seizure of several aquatic species)
  - Multi-species reptiles (simultaneous seizure of several reptile species)

- Geographic regions at the continental scale are based on the UN classification.

- The US\$ conversion rates used are those applicable during the month of the event.

- The main sources are indicated at the end of each event. Each event reported and/or analysed is from a recension of one or more articles or press releases. This critical review eliminates inconsistencies in date, price and quantity if necessary, and if possible mistakes or looseness about the description of the species. The original source(s) are enriched by cross-checking and additional information from previous issues of "On the Trail", by Robin des Bois' investigations and archives, and by international bibliography and iconography. Details of the sources are available on request by email to [contact@robindesbois.org](mailto:contact@robindesbois.org) indicating the "On the Trail" issue number, chapter and reference of the event.

Robin des Bois thanks the Species Survival Network, the NGO Save the Elephants and the Eagle Network for their alerts which enrich the daily monitoring carried out by the "On the Trail" team.

- When a species is CITES-listed at the time of the event, the Appendix is specified after its scientific name.

## CITES APPENDICES

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (182 Member States).

**Appendix I** : species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances and under import and export permits.

**Appendix II** : export permit required in order to avoid utilization incompatible with the species survival. Import permit if required by national law.

**Appendix III** : species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade. In the case of trade from a State that included the species in Appendix III, an export permit of that State is required.

## PICTOS



**Human death.** Guard, ranger, policeman, poacher... by firearm or other means.



**Judgment and sanction.** Condemnation, acquittal, fine...



**Trapping.** Poaching by jaw trap, snare, net ...



**Poisoning.** By chemicals, pesticides and medicines: cyanide, carbofuran, diclofenac, M99 ...



**Full moon.** Moonlight poaching

## ACRONYMS

**EAGLE** : Eco Activists for Governance and Law Enforcement

**ENV** : Education for Nature – Vietnam

**IBAMA** : Instituto brasileiro do meio ambiente e dos recursos naturais renováveis

**KWS** : Kenya Wildlife Service

**LAGA** : Last Great Ape Organization

**PROFEPA** : Procuraduría Federal de Protección al Ambiente

**SAPS** : South African Police Service

**SPCA** : Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

**SSB** : Sashastra Seema Bal

**SVW** : Save Vietnam Wildlife

**SWT** : Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

**USFWS** : United States Fish and Wildlife Service

**WCCB** : Wildlife Crime Control Bureau

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# RHINOCEROSSES



White rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*). Photo Wynand Uys

The white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* and black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* ranging in Africa are listed in Appendix I, except for the white rhinoceros populations of Eswatini and South Africa which are listed in Appendix II for trade of live animals and hunting trophies.

The 3 Asian rhinoceros species are in Appendix I: the Indian rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the Sumatran rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, and the Javan rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*.

## On the Trail n°39

**Black market horn quotation from media or official sources**  
**The values were estimated at the time of the seizures**

### 1 kg of raw horn

Continent	Country	US\$	Ref. (year)
Africa	Zimbabwe	48,400	2 (2023)

## EASTERN AFRICA

### MOZAMBIQUE

**Mid-February 2023**

**Maputo, Maputo Province, Mozambique**

Officials seize 4 horns worth 240,000 US\$ and make 2 arrests.

O País, February 16, 2023.<sup>1</sup>

### ZIMBABWE

**January 16, 2023**

**Harare, Harare Province, Zimbabwe**

Arrest of Wang Yang, foreman of a gold mine in Mutoko and resident of Hillside, for trafficking horns. Three accomplices were also arrested; Jabulani Muthimukulu, Weston Useyu, and Cleopas Kacheya, a policeman. At Muthimukulu's home, a pangolin scale was seized, leading him to be suspected of pangolin trafficking. The 4 men plead not guilty and are seeking bail. The poaching took place on the premises of Chipinge Safaris, Manicaland Province. Yang is believed to be the owner of 12.4 kg of horns and horn pieces, valued at 600,000 US\$ or 48,400 US\$/kg.

H-Metro, January 19, 2023; The Herald (Zimbabwe), January 19, 2023; The Zimbabwe Independent, January 19, 2023.<sup>2</sup>



## SOUTHERN AFRICA

### SOUTH AFRICA

**Beginning of January 2023**

**Eastern Cape Province, South Africa**

Discovery of 2 rhino carcasses. This is the first case of poaching in the province for 4 years (see "On the Trail n°23 p.105).

Helping Rhinos, January 7, 2023.<sup>3</sup>

**Beginning of January 2023**

**KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa**

Zululand Rhino Orphanage took in a 7-month-old rhino. He had been wandering alone for at least 2 weeks. His mother was the victim of poachers.

Helping Rhinos, February 9, 2023.<sup>4</sup>

## REPEATED OFFENCE

**January 17, 2023**

**Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**



Three men from Mozambique, ages 24, 28 and 50, were sentenced to 25 and 33 years in prison for poaching 3 rhinos, one of whom was black, in Kruger Park's Crocodile Bridge section in July 2022. The men took their 3 nasal horns and 3 frontal horns. They were also found in possession of illegal firearms, ammunition, and other dangerous weaponry (3 butcher's daggers), and broke into the Kruger and entered South Africa in violation of the Immigration Act. Muyanga, age 50, is expected to be released from prison at 83, unless his sentence is commuted. In viewing the investigation file, the court considered that he was a repeat offender. See "On the Trail" n°37 p.40.

TimesLIVE (South Africa), January 17, 2023; SAPS, January 18, 2023; News24, January 19, 2023.<sup>5</sup>



**January 26, 2023**

**Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**



Conviction of Forster Lubisi. He was a Kruger subscriber.

On April 15, 2015, rangers from the Skukuza section heard gunshots, followed tracks, and arrested Lubisi and Nelson Ndlovu. They were carrying a firearm, ammunition, and an axe. A rhino carcass lay nearby. They were arrested and released on bail.

Lubisi took the opportunity on July 29, 2018 to do it again in the company of a new accomplice, Een Sihlangu (see page 28 ref. 11), with whom he broke into the park. He was again arrested with weapons, ammunition, and an axe. He was then released on bail with Sihlangu.

On April 23, 2021, he broke into the Kruger National Park again with Sihlangu in a new area, the Stolzneke section. He was arrested by rangers with a firearm, ammunition, and 3 knives. This time he was denied bail and was sentenced to 32 years in prison. He is 43 years old.<sup>6</sup>

**February 1, 2023**

**Germiston, Gauteng Province, South Africa**



Chingo, the driver of the Toyota Fortuner intercepted in Johannesburg back in June 2022, was sentenced to 5 years in prison. There were 2 horns under the hood (see "On the Trail" n°36 p.50).

SAPS, February 10, 2023; TimesLIVE, February 11, 2023; Independent Online, February 12, 2023.<sup>7</sup>

**Night of February 1-2, 2023**

**Paterson, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa**

A male and a female rhino were found lying on the ground just a few yards apart, their legs in the air, horns amputated. Just one day before, they were seen grazing peacefully. "Bonnie" and "Clyde" had escaped poaching 10 years ago and never left each other's side.

Algoa FM, February 4, 2023; SAPS, February 4, 2023; News24, February 8, 2023.<sup>8</sup>

**OPERATION BLOOD ORANGE**

**FAMILY AFFAIRS**

**Beginning of February 2023**

**Bushbuckridge and Kabokweni, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**

The gang that took advantage of tactical (and paid) information from Kruger Park rangers David Chikwa Malukele and Solly Ubisi to facilitate rhino poaching now numbers 14 members: Martin Lekhuleni, Eunice Lekhuleni, Siphon Nyundu, Agina Mkhonto, Thandy Makhuvele, Ignatia Mnisi, Given Mzima, Joyce Maluleke, Nkateko Maluleke, Otters Maluleke, Miyelani Maluleke, Khensani Maluleke, Stephilina Mbhombi, and Francis Kipampa, from whose home rhino horn(s) were seized on December 2, 2022. They have been released on bail, although Kipampa's release has not been confirmed at the time of publication.

Along with the 2 rangers, who have also been released on bail, they are being prosecuted for corruption, money laundering, fraud, and trafficking rhino horns. To be continued.

See "On the Trail" n°36 p.47.

SAPS, February 6, 7 and June 3, 2023; The Bulrushes, February 7, 2023; Independent Online, February 7, 2023.<sup>9</sup>

**REPEATED OFFENCE**

**February 11, 2023**

**Kruger National Park, Pretoriuskop Section, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**

As Kruger rangers were busy repairing flood-induced damages, they remained vigilant in their anti-poaching mission. With very few tourists in the park, the presence of poachers was all the more likely. Looking closely at a pick-up belonging to one of their colleagues, they found not just their colleague dressed in full uniform at the Numbi gate, but 2 men in back under a black tarp, clearly suspected of wanting to poach rhinos. Their bags contained a large-calibre pistol with the number removed, 10 rounds of ammunition, and 2 butcher's knives. Bright Mashele, the 36-year-old ranger, and Collen Mathebula, 32, were released on 15,000 rand (865 US\$) bail, while the third man remains in prison for the time being. He has a lengthy criminal record. Krugersdorp News, February 14, 2023; Independent Online, February 15, 2023.<sup>10</sup>

**February 16, 2023**

**Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**



Een Sihlangu was sentenced to 21 years' imprisonment for breaking into the Kruger on 3 occasions in July 2018, April 2019 and April 2021 with accomplices, firearms, ammunition and butcher's knives considered to be dangerous weapons, clearly demonstrating in the court's view a premeditated intention to poach one or more rhinos. After his first 2 incursions in 2018 and 2019, he was released on bail. See above.

SAPS, February 17, 2023.<sup>11</sup>

**February 24, 2023**

**Maheng, North West Province, South Africa**



Somewhere in a nearby reserve, a rhino or 2 had a narrow escape. Three men ages 34, 40 and 56 were arrested before they could act and subsequently brought before the Ganyesa court.

SAPS, February 26, 2023; Save the Beasts, February 26, 2023.<sup>12</sup>



## NAMIBIA

### Beginning of January 2023

#### Etosha National Park, Oshikoto Region, Namibia

Arrest of a 28-year-old man. He is accused of attempting to poach a rhinoceros between January 4 and 6.

Namibian Sun, January 13, 2023.<sup>13</sup>

## NORTHERN AMERICA

### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### January 30, 2023

#### Kenansville, State of Florida, United States of America

Thanks to the insistence of local media outlets WKMG-TV and FOX 35 Orlando, the following story finally broke on January 30, 2023. Back in September 2022, Wild Florida Zoo announced with great fanfare the arrival of a rhinoceros and a dedicated enclosure for him, cleverly dubbed "habitat". However, the rhino never made it to the podium or the "habitat". When he arrived near Orlando 2 days earlier from a zoo in northern Florida, the supposedly calm, captive-hardened 3-year-old white rhinoceros was quick to express his discontent. He smashed all the wooden fences and escaped. Acting on management's orders, nursing staff struck him with at least 15 large-caliber bullets. According to Safari Park Wild Florida's belated press release, "In September 2022, a new rhino began to pose an imminent danger to the park at large, and after consultation with leadership and Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) guidelines, we made the difficult decision to humanely euthanize the animal". The fate of the horns is not known.

Wild Florida, September 15, 2022; WKMG-TV News 6, January 30 and February 7, 2023; FOX 35 Orlando, January 31, 2023.<sup>14</sup>



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© WKMG-TV News 6

## SOUTHERN ASIA

### INDIA

### January 13, 2023

#### Hatigaon, Nagaon District, State of Assam, India

A horn is seized and Abdul Ali and Kusum Ali arrested. They live next door to the Hatigaon tea plantation.

Pratidin Time, January 13, 2023.<sup>15</sup>

### NEPAL

### OPERATION ROUTE TO ROOT

#### January-Beginning of February 2023

Saraswati Nagar, Sitapaila and Gongabu, Kathmandu District, Bagmati Province; Waling, Syangja District, Gandaki Province; Bharatpur, Chitwan District, Bagmati Province; Madhyabindu-2, Nawalpur District, Gandaki Province, Nepal



January was a dark month for rhinos in Nepal:

- On Tuesday, January 3, 2 individuals were arrested with a freshly amputated, 522-gram horn in their hands.

- On Friday, January 20, a 14-year-old female rhino and her 4-year-old calf were found lying in a swamp several meters apart. The mother's horn had been cut off by poachers. Preliminary investigations suggest that both were electrocuted.



© Online Khabar

- In late January/early February, police arrested 13 suspects between the ages of 30 and 62, including 4 women, in the districts of Chitwan, Syangja and Kathmandu. They are part of a network of poachers, intermediaries, sellers, importers and exporters of horns, all the branches and ramifications of which remain to be discovered and shut down.

myRepublica, January 22, 2023; Online Khabar, January 22, 2023; The Rising Nepal, February 11, 2023.<sup>16</sup>



# RHINOS AND FELINES

## AFRICA

### MOZAMBIQUE

February 23, 2023

Maputo, Maputo Province, Mozambique



Trang Kiu Trang was stopped at Maputo airport with lion (*Panthera leo*, Appendix I) and rhinoceros by-products in November 2020 (see "On the Trail" n°31 p.50). She has just been sentenced to 16 years in prison. Club of Mozambique, February 24 and 28, 2023.<sup>1</sup>



## FELINES



Pallas's cat (*Otocolobus manul*). Photo Anna Barashkova

**On the Trail n°39**  
**Black market feline parts quotation from media or official sources**  
**The values were estimated at the time of the seizures**

Animal	Part	US\$	Country	Ref. (year)
Tiger	Tiger cub	8,000 - 25,000	USA	2 (2023)
		25,000	Mexico	1 (2022)
	Frozen adult tiger	64,000	Malaysia	15 (2023)
Leopard	Claw	60	India	37 (2023)
Jaguar	Jaguar skin hat	70	Bolivia	9* (2023)
	Skin	1,340	Peru	23* (2023)
Asian golden cat	Head	75 - 80	Thailand	76 (2023)
	Skin	5 - 30		
	Tail	11.50		

\*cf. chapter Multi-species