

Poaching Crisis As Rhino Horn Demand Booms In Asia

An estimated three rhinos were illegally killed each month in all of Africa from 2000-05, out of a population of around 18,000. In contrast, 12 rhinoceroses now are being poached each month in South Africa and Zimbabwe alone, the three groups told the 58th meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Standing Committee this week in Geneva. "Illegal rhino horn trade to destinations in Asia is driving the killing, with growing evidence of involvement of Vietnamese, Chinese and Thai nationals in the illegal procurement and transport of rhino horn out of Africa," the briefing states. Meanwhile, rhino poaching is also problematic in Asia. About 10 rhinos have been poached in India and at least seven in Nepal since January alone—out of a combined population of only 2,400 endangered rhinos. "Rhinos are in a desperate situation," said Dr. Susan Lieberman, Director of the Species Programme, WWF-International. "This is the worst rhino poaching we have seen in many years and it is critical for governments to stand up and take action to stop this deadly threat to rhinos worldwide. It is time to crack down on organized criminal elements responsible for this trade, and to vastly increase assistance to range countries in their enforcement efforts."

Almost all rhino species are listed in CITES (the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) in Appendix I, which means that any international trade of any rhino parts for commercial purposes is illegal. "Increased demand for rhino horn, alongside a lack of law enforcement, a low level of prosecutions for poachers who are actually arrested and increasingly daring attempts by poachers and thieves to obtain the horn is proving to be too much for rhinos and some populations are seriously declining," said Steven Broad, Executive Director of TRAFFIC. The situation is particularly dire in Zimbabwe where such problems are threatening the success of more than a decade's work of bringing rhino populations back to healthy levels. For example, earlier this week a park ranger arrested with overwhelming evidence against him for having killed three rhinos in the Chipinge Safari Area, was acquitted without any satisfactory explanation for the verdict. Similarly, in September 2008, a gang of four Zimbabwean poachers who admitted to killing 18 rhinos were also freed in a failed judiciary process.

The briefing concludes that governments need "an accurate and up-to-date picture of the status, conservation and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses, as well as the factors driving the consumption of rhinoceros horn, so that firm international action can be taken to arrest this immediate threat to rhinoceros populations worldwide." "Rhino populations in both Africa and Asia are being seriously threatened by poaching and illegal trade," said Dr. Jane Smart, Director of IUCN's Biodiversity Conservation Group. "IUCN and its African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups are working hard to gather data and information on rhinos so that CITES parties can make informed decisions and ensure that rhinos are still here for generations to come."

Source: ScienceDaily

News from Conservation Force

John Jackson III

Conservation Force is contesting trophy seizures and forfeitures in Federal District Courts from San Francisco and Los Angeles to New York. The first claims we filed were over four different leopard seizures in San Francisco that have evolved into three different federal court cases.

As we feared, the government has taken the legal position in San Francisco that any irregularity, including clerical errors, on permits or loss by third parties such as airlines renders that trophy contraband, which is illegal to possess or release. The government's position in the San Francisco case, set for hearing on 30 September, is that CAFRA does not apply to all trophies of listed species because it excludes contraband, and the trophies are contraband. If true, the "innocent owner defense" and "proportionality/excessive penalty" tests will not be available to hunters. It will take an Act of Congress to correct the injustice and the sooner the better. At worst, the cases across the country will demonstrate and showcase the problem. Until now, millions of dollars of trophies have been quietly forfeited while hunters have been misled to believe they were afforded protection of their interests by CAFRA and administrative remission proceedings. On the other hand, we hope to establish that clerical errors don't render trophies contraband like drugs and criminally obtained goods.

The negative attitude of the Agency we had gleaned has surfaced in the litigation. For example, the government is arguing that the purpose of the quota resolution adopted for leopard by CITES was intended to strictly limit trade, while we, on the other hand, view the adoption of quotas as a CITES attempt to facilitate trade and dispense with the need for the exporting and importing countries to make any further non-detriment finding. The quota resolutions actually state that those particular leopard populations are not in danger, that the hunting benefits them, and that importing authorities should permit the trade. Of course, leopards were not listed due to trophy trade in the first place, but it is the twisted view of those enforcing CITES in the field that we are contending with that trophy trade is disfavored. Moreover, the leopard in issue had both import and export permits demonstrating the trade was not detrimental and that it also enhanced the survival of the species. In other words, it was duplicatively approved trade.

We also have a growing number of cases where trophies have been seized for forfeiture because they were considered by the USF&WS Inspector upon entry to be crafted. That has ranged from elephant leg bones (not just ivory) that have been scrimshawed to tusks that have bases with a metal cap for support. How the Service can unilaterally change the listing of a species by declaring it not to be a trophy is beyond my imagination. It is now up to two or more New York Federal District Court Judges to decide in separate cases.

Source: Conservation Bulletin – The Hunting Report

For hunter-conservationists and all people who are interested in the conservation, management and the sustainable use of Africa's wild natural resources.

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