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## **SSN Rhino Newsletter**

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Species Survival Network

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### **Thirty-three rhino horns seized in Hong Kong**

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In November 2011, Hong Kong officials seized 33 rhino horns, which they said had originated in South Africa and were en route to mainland China.

The horns were wrapped in layers of tin foil and plastic, perhaps in an attempt to prevent detection by X-ray scanners.

Along with the horns, there were 758 ivory chopsticks and 127 ivory bracelets.

Ref: 1

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### **South Africa considers amending rules on rhino hunting**

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On 30th September 2011, the South African Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Ms Edna Molewa, published a set of proposed amendments to the regulations governing the hunting of rhinos.

Among the proposed amendments were provisions that would:

- require all rhino hunts to be supervised by a conservation official
- require all rhino horns originating from natural mortalities and dehorning, or horns already in legal private possession and which are not already micro-chipped, to be micro-chipped by the permit issuing authority
- require that information about natural mortalities, deaths resulting from hunting, translocation and movement across provincial borders be kept on a database maintained by the National Department of Environmental Affairs

- require that, when an application for the possession of rhino horn is submitted, detailed information about the weight and dimensions (circumference, inner length and outer length) of each horn be submitted, along with a photograph
- require the horns from each hunt to remain attached to the remainder of the trophy and transported to the taxidermist either by the hunting outfitter, by the professional hunter or by the hunter accompanied by the professional hunter

The Ministry has also suggested that it may impose a moratorium on rhino hunting, but it is not clear at the moment whether the above measures are to be tested in the field before a decision is made on a possible moratorium.

The Ministry allowed a one-month consultation period on the proposed amendments and is expected to publish its findings in the near future.

Ref: 2

## **Rhino poaching in key range States**

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### **African rhinos**

In 2010, 333 rhinos were poached in South Africa alone. In 2011, the final tally was 443.

Between 2006-2009, a total of 235 rhinos are reported to have been poached in Zimbabwe (CoP15 Doc. 45.1 Annex). Newspaper reports on the situation are contradictory. The Minister of Environment and Natural Resources reported that sixty-six rhinos were poached in 2010, while another press report puts the figure for that year at 30. According to this report, 23 rhinos were poached in 2011 and 37 rhino poachers and illegal traders arrested.

The Kenya Wildlife Service reports that 5 black and one white rhino were poached in 2008, 16 black and five whites rhinos in 2009, sixteen black and six white in 2010 and, up to September 2011, ten black and eight white rhinos.

### **Poached rhinos as a percentage of entire population in key African range States**

	Reported number poached 2006-2011 to date	Reported number poached 2006-2011 to date as % of 2010 rhino numbers	Reported number poached 2010	Reported number poached in 2010 as % of 2010 rhino numbers
Kenya	62	6.47%	22	2.29%
Namibia	4	0.18%	2	0.09%
South Africa	826	3.99%	333	1.61%
Zimbabwe	321	44.52%	45	6.24%

*From: Update on African rhino status and trends from IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) August 2011*

Refs: 3-7

### **Asian rhinos**

Overall, for the Vulnerable greater one-horned rhino, poaching rates are lower than for African species, but they appear to be rising.

Poaching attempts are reported to have increased in Asia and the number of rhino horns in local trade has doubled in the past 2 years.

A rhino census was conducted in Nepal in April 2011. A total of 534 rhinos were recorded, an increase of 99 over the 2008 figure. Since January 2011, two rhinos are reported to have been poached in Chitwan National Park.

The Nepali press reported that at least 28 rhinos died in the year to June 2010 and that more than half of them were killed by poachers.

In October 2011, it was reported that 17 rhino horn smugglers had been arrested in Nepal.

Refs: 8-10

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### **Rhino extinct in Vietnam**

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It is now known that the last Vietnamese Javan rhino has been poached for its horn. In October 2011, it was reported that the rhino is now extinct in Vietnam. There had been only one sighting of rhino since 2008, and genetic analysis of dung samples, collected between 2009-2010 in Cat Tien National Park showed that they all belonged to just one individual. Shortly after the survey was completed, the rhino was found shot dead. Its horn had been removed.

The last remaining stronghold of Javan rhinos is now restricted to Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park and adjoining areas of the Gunung Honje forests. It has been estimated that the population of Javan rhinos ranges between 35 and 44. But a recent camera-trap survey in the eastern half of Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park recorded 17 rhinos, of which only four were female. Officials say that the cameras have now been moved to the more remote western half of the park, and that they hope to find more females there.

Ref: 11

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### **Western black rhino extinct**

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In November 2011, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature declared that Africa's western black rhino was extinct. IUCN also said that the Northern White Rhino of central Africa is "possibly extinct" in the wild.

Ref: 12

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### **South Africa considers legalising rhino horn trade**

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In October 2011, it was reported that South Africa had commissioned a study into whether legalising trade in rhino horn would help to reduce poaching.

The spokesman for the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), Albie Modise, said "We are impartial at this stage but we are looking at all the suggestions which could help us in the fight against poachers. We are awaiting submissions and would consider this if we get authentic scientific backing that this would be effective".

The DEA also said that rhino horn stockpiles could be sold to fund rhino conservation efforts.

Ref: 13

## **Lao company connected with rhino poaching in South Africa**

In June 2011 Chumlong Lemtongthai, a Thai national, arrived in South Africa from Thailand. Officials searched and questioned him, and discovered among his documents an order for 50 rhino horns. Lemtongthai had been issued rhino trophy hunting permits by the South African government.

Lemtongthai's address in Johannesburg turned out to be the house where two other Thai nationals, Phicet Thongphai and Punpitak Chunchom, had been found to be in possession of lion bones. Upon pleading guilty, they had each been fined R10 000 (US \$1,473). Additional penalties of a R100 000 (US \$14,729) fine or a five year prison sentence had been suspended on condition that the men immediately leave the country.

The men had claimed that they had been sent by their company, Lao-based *Xay Savang Export-Import Trading, Ltd*, to photograph lion bones that had been offered for sale by South African game farmers. Chunchom is alleged to have recruited Thai prostitutes to pose as "hunters", in order to circumvent South African rules that permit hunters to kill only one rhino per year.

In September 2011, it was revealed in court that 26 rhinos had been shot this way, and Lemtongthai had bought the horns for US\$8,500 per kilogram, later selling them on the black market for between US\$35 000 and US\$55 000.

In 2009, the company's name appeared on documents relating to a shipment of 260 kilograms of elephant ivory and 18 kg of rhino horn seized at Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport.

*Xay Savang* has also been implicated in the farming of long-tailed macaques for export to China.

Refs: 14-16

## **Vietnamese nationals caught with rhino horn in South Africa**

In December 2011, South African authorities arrested two Vietnamese nationals at O.R. Tambo International Airport as they attempted to smuggle rhino horns and elephant ivory. X-ray scanners picked up the contraband in their suitcases. They discovered two rhino horns, five elephant tusks, 20 ivory chopsticks, 31 ivory bangles, 18 ivory blocks and three ivory earrings.

The two arrested - a 40 year-old man and a 30 year-old woman - were charged with illegal possession of elephant ivory and rhino horn under the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA).

Ref: 17

## **South African rhino farmers and hunters involved in poaching**

Three of the major cases currently going through the South African courts are those of Marnus Steyl, alleged to have facilitated the Thai rhino hunting syndicate, George Fletcher and Dawie Groenewald, who was arrested in September 2010, along with a network of associates, including a pilot, a professional hunter and two vets.

## **The Steyl-Lemtongthai gang**

Steyl's involvement with Xaysavang is reported to date back to 2010.

In a letter dated October 30th 2010, Steyl confirmed that "*Steyl Game CC* helps to organise and conduct hunting for clients of Xaysavang Trading Export-Import co Ltd of Laos" and "assists with the export of predators, wild game, antelope and exotic species like rhino, lion, sable and roan antelope".

A month later, Xaysavang was invoiced a total R1.3m by *Steyl Game* for 22kg of rhino horn. A month later, an amount of R434 000 was invoiced for "3 rhino".

Documents also show that the company charged Xaysavang R65 000 for a consignment of lion bones on November 4th.

The case against Steyl and Lemtongthai continues: Steyl has been granted bail; Lemtongthai has not.

Ref: 18

## **The Fletcher gang**

A rhino horn case involving hunters George Fletcher, Gert Saaiman, and Frans Deventer was thrown out in October 2010.

The suspects were believed to be responsible for slaughtering at least 19 rhinos in order to profit from the illegal rhino horn trade.

Multiple charges had been brought against the accused, including racketeering, money laundering, various counts of theft, malicious damage to property and contraventions of the various provincial Conservation Acts and the Aviation Act.

The prosecution's main witness, Gideon van Deventer, had refused to testify because of intimidation claims and a postponement was sought. However, the judge decided that the case should be dismissed. It is not yet known whether a fresh prosecution will follow.

Refs: 19, 20

## **The Groenewald gang**

Alleged rhino poacher and wildlife farm owner Dawie Groenewald was arrested in September 2010. Groenewald and his associates were charged with numerous offences, including assault, fraud, corruption, malicious damage to property, illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, and contravening the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act.

Earlier in 2011, Groenewald had been found guilty in an American court of exporting an illegally hunted leopard from South Africa to the U.S.

It is believed that the group may be responsible for the deaths of hundreds of rhinos in recent years. The buried carcasses of 20 rhinos were discovered on Groenewald's property in late 2010. Investigators believe the farm owner was buying up to 100 rhino a year, but was not able to account for many of these animals.

After an appeal, Groenewald's bail was reduced from R1,000,000 (US\$ 126,208) to R100,000 (US\$ 12,621), and he was later in the headlines again after being granted permission by the provincial authorities to purchase more rhinos.

In September 2011, Groenewald and his associates were formally charged in court. In all, over 1800 charges were laid against them. No trial date has yet been set.

Refs: 21-23

### **Alleged poacher commits suicide**

A farmer in the Musina district of South Africa, who had been arrested for selling rhino horns, was reported to have shot himself in November 2010. Tom Fourie was accused of selling 36 rhino horns to another local wildlife farmer. The pair was due to appear in court on January 28th 2011.

Ref: 24

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## **Bi-lateral meetings**

In July 2011, bilateral discussions were held in Johannesburg between the South African Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Ms Edna Molewa and Shengxian Zhou, Minister of Environmental Protection of the People's Republic of China. At this meeting it was agreed that the existing MoU between South Africa and China on cooperation in the field of Environmental Management will be used to strengthen collaboration in terms of enforcement matters relating to wildlife trafficking.

In October 2010, a South African government delegation visited to Vietnam to discuss the role played by that country in the illegal trade in rhino horn. A return visit to South Africa by Vietnamese government officials took place in September 2011, immediately after a meeting of the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT – see below). The South African and Vietnamese officials agreed on a process towards signing Memorandum of Understanding, whose objective is to promote co-operation between the two countries in the field of biodiversity conservation and protection, law enforcement and compliance with CITES on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

The South African government reported that the two countries have agreed that the MoU - and the subsequent implementation plan - will allow for cooperation in the areas of biodiversity conservation, biodiversity law enforcement, wildlife trade, information and intelligence sharing and gathering, permit issuing processes and verification mechanisms, monitoring and reporting systems, technology development and sharing, capacity building and training, prosecution and law enforcement, awareness, knowledge and research, custom services and legal systems within which the two countries operate.

Refs: 25, 26

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## **Meeting of the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT)**

Members of CAWT met in South Africa at the end of September 2011, to try to find solutions to the rhino poaching crisis. Those in attendance included government representatives, enforcement officials, revenue and customs personnel, police and NGOs. The meeting provided an opportunity for the exchange of information and ideas relating to rhino poaching, consumer education, law enforcement, international crime syndicates, market forces and rhino horn stockpiles.

Ref: 27



## **Rhino horns continue to be stolen from European museums**

In August 2011, SSN members reported to the CITES Standing Committee that a minimum of 41 rhino horns had been stolen from museums, zoos and other private collections in Europe, South Africa and the USA since April 2008. Since then, five more horns have been stolen in Europe. In the UK and Czech Republic, thieves also stole three fake horns, which museum staff had substituted for the original horns, having been warned by the police. The countries where private collections have been targeted are: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.

Ref: 28



The Hong Kong rhino horn and ivory seizure

*The SSN Rhino Newsletter is produced by the SSN Rhino Working Group as a service to CITES Parties. If you have news that you would like included in a future issue, please do not hesitate to contact us, Mark Jones and Susie Watts, Co-chairs of the SSN Rhino Working Group at [mjones@hsi.org](mailto:mjones@hsi.org)*



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