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TRADE IN
SOUTH AFRICAN
ABALONE

THE POACHING OF
MALAYAN SUN BEARS

REPORT OF 15TH
CITES MEETING

The journal of the TRAFFIC network disseminates information
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SURGE IN RHINOCEROS POACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA

RHINOCEROS poaching in South Africa shows no signs of abating, with the number of animals illegally killed in the country this year alone rising beyond 200 (September 2010). This compares to 122 poached in the whole of 2009 in South Africa, itself the worst year for two decades.

Poaching gangs are increasingly sophisticated in their mode of operation: helicopters are often deployed to track the rhinoceroses (White Rhinoceroses *Ceratotherium simum* and Black Rhinoceroses *Diceros bicornis*) from which the animals are shot using guns or tranquilizing darts; the horns are removed using a chainsaw and quickly taken from the scene by air. The whole operation can take as little as 10 minutes. If the rhinoceros hasn't already died, it will often bleed to death.

"The number of horns moving out of Africa is escalating, with poached horns able to move from the site of the kill to the global market in as little as 48 hours," said Tom Milliken, Director of TRAFFIC's programme in East/Southern Africa.

"The resurgence in rhino horn trade is linked to the availability of cellular phones for rapid communication, internet marketing so that criminals remain anonymous and the growing presence of Asian organized crime in Africa," he said.

However, enforcement officers in the country have hit back with a number of significant breakthroughs in tackling the spiralling poaching. In late September, 11 people appeared in court on suspicion of being part of an organized rhino poaching racket. They included two veterinarians and a businessman. All were bailed and are due to appear in court in April 2011. On the same day, in a separate arrest, a man accused of supplying firearms to Mozambican nationals to poach rhinoceroses in Kruger National Park appeared in Nelspruit Magistrates' Court. He was also accused of smuggling horns to Mozambique where they were sold to Vietnamese and Chinese nationals and shipped to East Asia. A Chinese national and a Mozambican man also appeared in Phalaborwa Magistrates' Court charged with illegal possession of rhinoceros horn, although the outcome of their application for bail is presently unknown.

Neighbouring Namibia has warned poachers to steer clear of its rhinoceroses. "Poach a rhino in Namibia, and the blood of the people will be on your hands," said Netumbo Nanditwah, Namibia's Minister of Environment and Tourism.

"You will not be poaching a State rhino, but will be stealing from our people, depriving whole communities of a livelihood."

The Minister noted that, according to the Elephant Trade Information System—the global ivory trade monitoring system managed by TRAFFIC on behalf of CITES Parties—Namibia had one of the best track records in the world for arresting, prosecuting and convicting ivory poachers.

Meanwhile in Europe, the UK Government announced in September a ban on the export of rhinoceros horns except under exceptional circumstances; previously the export of antique horns was permissible.

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The ban came after evidence of antique rhino horn and horn products being legally imported from across Europe for re-sale in the UK. The horns were sold at auction houses and then re-exported, often to East Asia, where powdered rhino horn is in high demand for use in medicines, despite no proven clinical efficacy.

Richard Benyon, UK Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, said: "I am extremely concerned about the increase in the number of rhinoceros horn products being sold through UK auction houses. We believe this is providing a financial incentive for poachers and encouraging the use of rhinoceros horns in Asian medicine."

Following the UK's announcement, government officials will be contacting all auction houses and major antique trade associations in the country to highlight the implications of trading rhino horn, and explain why most applications to export such items will be refused. The case will also be made to ensure a co-ordinated EU approach to the problem.

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