

ON_{the} TRAIL

The defaunation bulletin
n°47. Events from the 1st of July to the 31st of August 2025



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animals poaching and smuggling
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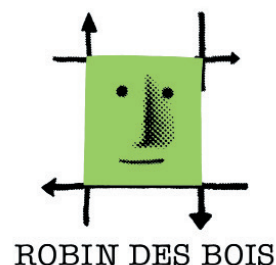
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CONTENTS

3	NOTE AND ADVICE TO READERS
5	ON THE FRONT LINES
6	PANGOLINS
11	PANGOLINS, HIPPOPOTAMUSES, ELEPHANTS, RHINOCEROSES, AND FELINES
13	ELEPHANTS
21	MAMMOTHS
22	ELEPHANTS, RHINOCEROSES, AND HIPPOPOTAMUSES
23	RHINOCEROSES
26	RHINOCEROSES AND FELINES
27	FELINES
41	CANIDS
43	BEARS
49	BOVIDS AND PRONGHORNS
53	GIRAFFES
54	ZEBRAS AND DONKEYS
56	DEER AND MUSK DEER
60	GUANACOS
61	PRIMATES
72	OTHER MAMMALS
78	BIRDS
104	VARIOUS REPTILE SPECIES
107	TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES
114	SNAKES
120	LIZARDS
124	CROCODILIANS
127	AMPHIBIANS
128	INSECTS AND ARACHNIDS
130	MULTI-SPECIES
150	VARIOUS MARINE SPECIES
151	CORALS
153	MARINE MOLLUSCS AND GOOSENECK BARNACLES
155	ABALONES
158	SEA CUCUMBERS
162	SEA URCHINS
162	SEAHORSES
163	HORSESHOE CRABS
164	MARINE OR FRESHWATER FISH
172	MARINE TURTLES
177	MARINE AND FRESHWATER MAMMALS
181	INDEX
191	SOURCES

■ ELEPHANTS, RHINOCEROSES, AND HIPPOPOTAMUSES ■

AFRICA

MALAWI

August 21, 2025

Blantyre, Southern Region, Malawi

Chrissy Dailesi, Hellen Maunjiri, Elizabeth Mpira, Steven Kandoje, Ronnex Lopanda and Nadeem Omar sentenced to fines of 6 million kwachas (3,450 US\$) or, failing payment, to 15 months in prison after attempting to sell 2 small carved tusks made from recent ivory and 2 rhino horns on July 26, 2024, in Blantyre. Only Omar paid the fine. The other 5 remain in prison.¹



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Beginning of July 2025

Mahagi, Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Border with Uganda.

The ICCN and the police recovered hippopotamus ivory (*Hippopotamus amphibius*, Appendix II) and elephant ivory. The trafficking of *Hippopotamus amphibius* teeth between Arua, Uganda, and Mahagi, Democratic Republic of Congo, is concerning.²

TANZANIA

July 17, 2025

Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania

For traffickers, ivory is ivory, no matter if it comes from tusks or teeth (see "On the Trail" n°46, p. 22, ref. 1). Abubakari Msangi, a 48-year-old businessman, pleaded for leniency. He suffers from eye cancer and his family needs him, including his orphaned son in middle school. Msangi was caught in possession of raw hippopotamus ivory (*Hippopotamus amphibius*, Appendix II) and elephant ivory, worth 41 million shillings (18,000 US\$) in total. He received 20 years for the elephant ivory and 20 years for the hippopotamus ivory. The court granted clemency, combining the 2 sentences.³



End of August 2025

Peramiho, Ruvuma Region, Tanzania

"Slowly but surely," says The Tanzania Times, "hippopotamus teeth seem to be replacing elephants' tusks in the poachers and wildlife traffickers' bags." To support its claim, the newspaper reports the seizure in the south of the country of 64 elephant tusks or sections of tusks, 145 hippopotamus teeth (*Hippopotamus amphibius*, Appendix II) and two warthog tusks (genus *Phacochoerus*). A hippopotamus has 36 to 40 teeth in total. Those sought for ivory are the incisors (8 per individual) and canines (4 per individual). The seizure would therefore appear to be the result of the poaching of at least 12 hippopotamuses.⁴

ZIMBABWE

July 16, 2025

Harare, Harare Province, Zimbabwe

Cong, a Chinese passport holder, had 7.7 kg of rhino horn and 36.15 kg of raw ivory confiscated from his home. The horn is estimated to be worth 31,170 US\$/kg and the ivory 170 US\$/kg.⁵

ASIA

CHINA

August 2025

Beijing Autonomous Municipality, China

Sentence handed down by the 4th People's Court to Mr. Shen, not his real name, an antique collector and dealer, to a one-year suspended prison sentence, a probation period of one and a half years, and a fine of 10,000 yuan (1,400 US\$) for purchasing from abroad via the Internet over a period of 5 years 102 pieces of carved ivory and a hippopotamus tooth (*Hippopotamus amphibius*, Appendix II) with a total estimated value of 42,000 US\$. He had the "goods" sent to him under false names.⁶



RHINOCEROSES



Indian rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*). Photo Amaël Borzée (CC BY-NC)

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*.

AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA

July 2, 2025

Swellendam, Western Cape Province, South Africa

The police arrested Shaun Barties (41), Christopher Farret (35), and Cheslyn Whitebooi (45) for selling three rhino horns, worth an estimated 258,270 rand or 14,450 US\$.¹

July 25 and 26, 2025

Paulpietersburg, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa

- In the early hours of Friday morning, 3 individuals broke into a reserve, tied up 2 guards, stole their assault rifles, killed a female rhino, cut off the horn, and fled when they heard the general alarm siren.

- In the early hours of Saturday morning, Simanga Mnguni, Betwell Baloye and Muziwakhe Nkosi were tracked down in the bush. They had been searched for by the entire community. They were in possession of a horn, a .303 calibre rifle, and the assault rifle stolen from the 2 guards.²



August 12, 2025

Thabazimbi, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Peter Zacharia Chaya, 27, of Mozambican origin, was sentenced to 15 years in prison, 7 years of which were suspended, for attempting to poach a rhinoceros in April 2024. An accomplice is still at large.³



August 13, 2025

Namakgale, Limpopo Province, South Africa

The case got off to a flying start, based on reliable testimony. Why doubt the word of Major General Jan Scheepers, who was in charge of the operation: “from the helicopter the place looked like a slaughterhouse and everywhere you looked rhinos were lying there dead.” In December 2023, the Hawks raided the farm run by Derek Lewitton, a dual American and South African citizen and member of WRSA (Wildlife Ranching South Africa), which promotes the regulated return of the international rhino horn trade (see “On the Trail” n°43 p.25, ref.7). Two years later, the case has fizzled out. The Namakgale court ruled that the 35 charges against Mr Lewitton were not supported by sufficient evidence and he was acquitted on all counts. As a rhino farmer, he claimed he had the right to keep in his strongroom the rhino horns seized from poachers by his security guards or discarded by poachers as they fled.⁴



REPEATED OFFENCE

August 19, 2025

Pretoria, Gauteng Province, South Africa

The former owner of nearly 2,000 rhinos returns to the forefront of the legal scene.



Appearance of John Hume, 83, founder and former owner of Buffalo Dream Ranch, now Platinum Rhino Conservation Enterprise, Clive Melville, 63, defendant n°2, transport maintenance manager, Izak Hermanus Du Toit, 50, defendant n°3, lawyer appointed as prosecutor for the High Court of Mpumalanga Province, Elizabeth Catharina Van Niekerk, 58, defendant n°4, former head of marketing and legal compliance at Buffalo Dream Ranch, Mattheus Poggenpoel, 37, defendant n°5, insurance broker and rhino breeder, and Johannes Hennop, 52, defendant n°6, former head of operations at Buffalo Dream Ranch. All 6

surrendered voluntarily to the Sunnyside police station. They are suspected by the National Prosecuting Authority and the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (known as the Hawks) of having run an international white rhino horn trafficking operation between 2017 and 2024 in violation of the regulations of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment. They face 55 charges including racketeering, fraud, theft, money laundering, and violations of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act and the Riotous Assemblies Act.

Release on bail of 100,000 rand (5,600 US\$) for Hume, 10,000 rand (560 US\$) for Melville and Van Niekerk, and 2,000 rand (110 US\$) for Hermanus Du Toit, Poggenpoel, and Hennop, paltry sums compared to the profits they made or sought to make by issuing fraudulent permits for 964 rhino horns with an estimated value of 250 million rand, or 14 million US\$, and 14,500 US\$ per horn. Each of them must surrender their passports to the court, refrain from applying for new documents allowing them to travel abroad until the trials are over, not conceal evidence or seek to influence witnesses, and not commit any crimes while on bail. Melville admitted in court that he had been fined in 2019 for fraudulently transporting rhino horns (see “On the Trail” n°29 p.46, ref. 8, which recounts Melville’s actions and subsequent convictions). Poggenpoel admitted to the illegal possession of a horn in 2009, for which he paid an admission of guilt fee of 2,500 rand (140 US\$). By the end of the year, he will also be tried for failing to secure a firearm and for illegal use of a medicinal substance, two alleged offences that were discovered during investigators’ “visit” to his home.

John Hume sold his ranch in September 2023 to the NGO African Parks, which has committed to releasing Hume’s herd and contributing to the revitalization of declining white rhino populations in South Africa and neighbouring countries. 40 rhinos were relocated to the Munywana Conservancy (KwaZulu Natal province) in May 2024, 120 to reserves adjoining Kruger Park (Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces) in June 2024, a “group” to the Dinokeng Reserve (Gauteng province) in November 2024, and 70 to Akagera National Park in Rwanda in June 2025.

John Hume and Clive Melville, see “On the Trail” n°1 p.25, n°11 p.57, n°17 p.74 (ref.10), n°18 p.69 (ref.8), n°29 p.46 (ref.8), n°30 p.46 (ref.19), n°35 p.38 (ref.10) and n°36 p.50 (ref.28).⁵

KENYA

REPEATED OFFENCE

August 26, 2025

Mombasa, Mombasa County, Kenya

It's the big comeback on the public scene for Feiswal Mohammed Ali, alias Feisal, after his involvement in June 2014 in the sensational Tudor garage case in Mombasa and the seizure of 314 tusks, after his flight with Interpol hot on his heels, his arrest in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in December, his transfer to Kenya, his bail refusal in March 2015, his sentencing to 20 years in prison and a fine of 20 million shillings (nearly 200,000 US\$) in July 2016, and his acquittal by the High Court in August 2018 (see "On the Trail" n°5 p. 90, n°6 p. 81, ref.42, n°7 p. 78, ref.9 and p. 87, ref.57, n°8 p.79, ref.54, n°10 p.59, ref.53, n°12 p.78, ref.16, n°14 p.75, ref.5 and n°22 p.86).

Now aged 58, Feisal has just been arrested with a 75-year-old accomplice in possession of 2 rhino horns weighing a total of 2.2 kg and with a modest estimated value of 2 million shillings, or 15,500 US\$ and 7,000 US\$/kg. Internal intelligence reports indicate that Feisal and his partner Mohammed Hassan Kontoma were looking for a buyer.⁶



Feisal, 2014



Feisal, 2025

NAMIBIA

Mid-July 2025

Namibia

A female rhinoceros has recovered after undergoing treatment for a gunshot wound to the head a few months ago. She was dehorned to prevent further attacks.⁷

ZIMBABWE

August 2, 2025

Save Valley Conservancy, Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe

The poacher or poachers who killed the female black rhino were not amateurs. A single .458 calibre bullet was enough to take the life of Michele, and that bullet flew silently. The rifle was equipped with a silencer. As for the dehorning, it was done quietly, so to speak. The canine units and security guards were only able to locate and collect a few footprints leading to the road.⁸

ASIA

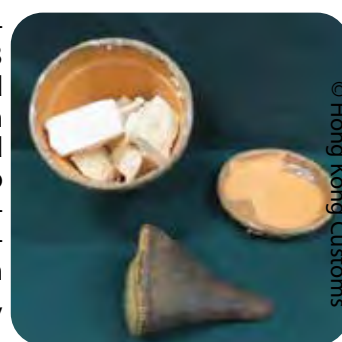
CHINA

July 11, 2025

Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China



Authorities arrested two men, ages 33 and 40, and recovered 2.7 kg of rhino horn in two packages shipped from Spain, said to contain "ceramic ornament statues". Estimated value: 1 million HK\$, or 127,390 US\$, and 47,180 US\$/kg.⁹



August 15, 2025

Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Jiang and Wang, not their real names, pleaded guilty voluntarily and signed a plea agreement. They were sentenced to 8 months' suspended imprisonment with a one-year probation period for attempting to sell rhino horn artefacts with an estimated total value of 70,000 yuan (nearly 10,000 US\$) at an antiques market in November 2024.¹⁰



NEPAL

August 6, 2025

Jogital, Makwanpur District, and Bhairabpur, Chitwan District, Bagmati Province, Nepal



- A male rhino aged around 20 died from electrocution near a rice field during the night between Tuesday and Wednesday.



© The Kathmandu Post

- A farmer died from electrocution after accidentally touching the fence he had just installed to prevent rhinos, elephants, and other wild animals from accessing his crops.

The buffer zone of Chitwan National Park, which covers 728 km² in the districts of Chitwan, East Nawalparasi, Makwanpur, and Parsa, is home to more than 300,000 people in approximately 45,000 households. Conflicts with elephants, rhinos, and wild boars are frequent. During the last fiscal year, 456 instances of crop damage were reported, 255 by rhinos, 100 by wild boars, and 67 by elephants. High-voltage fences powered by batteries or illegal connections to the public grid are subject to penalties, while low-voltage fences powered by solar panels quickly break down, leaving “farmers feeling they have no choice but to take extreme measures,” according to Man Bahadur Syangbo, chairman of a Chitwan Park Buffer Zone Users Committee. “Farmers get a maximum of 10,000 rupees (70 US\$) per crop season in compensation.

But actual losses can be many times higher,” notes the head of another users committee. “These traps are turning fields into death zones—for rhinos, elephants, and now people. It’s a dangerous trend,” laments Thapa Magar, information officer at Chitwan National Park.

Fatal electrocutions of people by crop protection fences in Nepal, see page 20 ref.46.¹¹

VIET NAM

July 24, 2025

Hanoi Municipality, Viet Nam



Sentencing of Nguyen Dinh Dung to 5 years in prison for attempting to smuggle 900 grammes of rhino horn, 10 leopard fangs (*Panthera pardus*, Appendix I), and 4 lion fangs (*Panthera leo*, Appendix II). Dung said he agreed to transport the trophies for 5 million dong (200 US\$). He attempted to evade customs officials by hiding them in specially made pockets in his pants and taping them around his waist.¹²



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RHINOCEROSES AND FELINES

ASIA

THAILAND

August 18, 2025

Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok, Thailand

Seizure in the luggage of a Vietnamese national travelling from Mozambique via Kenya to Vientiane in Laos of 13.55 kg of rhino horn sections and 220 claws and fangs attributed to big cats. Experts are currently identifying the species.¹



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