

ROBIN DES BOIS

ON_{the} TRAIL

The defaunation bulletin
n°48. Events from the 1st of September to the 31st of October 2025



Quarterly information and analysis report on endangered
animals poaching and smuggling
Published on May 4, 2026
Original version in French

ON_{the} TRAIL

Publication Director : Charlotte Nithart.

Editors-in-Chief : Jacky Bonnemains and Charlotte Nithart.

Writing : Jacky Bonnemains, Gaëlle Guilissen,
Elodie Crépeau-Pons, Jean-Pierre Edin and Elisabeth Lavarde.

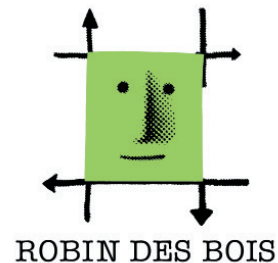
Research : Gaëlle Guilissen, Elodie Crépeau-Pons, Elisabeth Lavarde,
Jean-Pierre Edin, Juan Andrés García Bodniza, Greg Wilhelm and Lise Contant.

Cartography : Gaëlle Guilissen and Elodie Crépeau-Pons.

English translation : Elisabeth Lavarde et Cora Funke.

Cover : Red-necked tanager (*Tangara cyanocephala*). Photo Luciano Bernardes (CC BY-NC).

Carried out by Robin des Bois (Robin Hood) with the support of
the Fondation Franz Weber, the Fondation Brigitte Bardot and donors and members of Robin des Bois



"On the Trail" gets sponsorship from the Séché Environnement group



Previous issues in English :

<http://www.robindesbois.org/en/a-la-trace-bulletin-dinformation-et-danalyses-sur-le-braconnage-et-la-contrebande/>

Previous issues in French :

<http://www.robindesbois.org/a-la-trace-bulletin-dinformation-et-danalyses-sur-le-braconnage-et-la-contrebande/>

Robin des Bois

Non Governmental Organization for the protection of the environment and populations

Founded in 1985

14 rue de l'Atlas 75019 Paris, France

tel : 33 (1) 48.04.09.36

www.robindesbois.org

contact@robindesbois.org

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:

- Eléphants and rhinoceroses
- Various reptile species (simultaneous seizure of several reptile species)
- Various marine species (simultaneous seizure of several aquatic 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.

- 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.

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 (184 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

CONTENTS

3	NOTE AND ADVICE TO READERS
5	ON THE FRONT LINES
6	PANGOLINS
13	ELEPHANTS
25	ELEPHANTS AND RHINOCEROSES
26	RHINOCEROSES
32	FELINES
42	CANIDS AND HYAENAS
45	BEARS
52	BOVIDS AND PRONGHORNS
58	GIRAFFES
60	ZEBRAS AND DONKEYS
61	DEER AND MUSK DEER
66	GUANACOS AND VICUNAS
67	PRIMATES
79	OTHER MAMMALS
84	BIRDS
121	VARIOUS REPTILE SPECIES
125	TORTOISES AND FRESHWATER TURTLES
134	SNAKES
137	LIZARDS
139	CROCODILIANS
143	AMPHIBIANS
144	INSECTS AND ARACHNIDS
146	MULTI-SPECIES
164	VARIOUS MARINE SPECIES
165	CORALS
166	MARINE MOLLUSCS AND GOOSENECK BARNACLES
168	ABALONES
170	SEA CUCUMBERS AND SEA URCHINS
174	MARINE OR FRESHWATER FISH, SEAHORSES
184	MARINE TURTLES
188	MARINE AND FRESHWATER MAMMALS
190	INDEX
202	SOURCES

September 8, 2025

Paris/Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine, Department of Seine-Saint-Denis, France

Seizure at the flea market of 88 antique silver items by customs agents acting on 2 grounds: the trade in precious metals and the trade in wildlife products. 80 of the antique items were not hallmarked, and the dealer was not registered as a precious metals dealer. This hallmarking practice has been in use in France since the 13th century. It protects against the risk of fraud regarding the quality of metals. Today, the jewellery industry and customs authorities use laser marking, which poses no risk of damaging even the most delicate pieces. Eight antiques contained ivory elements. The total value of the items is estimated at 318,000 € (371,000 US\$). Those made of silver will be partially returned to their owner after compliance upgrade and regulatory marking.⁶⁸



They are also similar to the 7 tusks seized in August 2018 on the Nairobi-Mombasa highway. The person behind this smuggling operation is believed to have been Italian (see "On the Trail" n°22, p. 87).



September 2025



August 2018

A retired Italian diplomat, Diego Marino Enrico, was arrested in April 2021 in Kampala (Uganda) for the possession of elephant and hippopotamus ivory (see "On the Trail" n°32 p.31, ref.77).

Colonial Italy included Eritrea, Somalia, and Ethiopia.⁶⁹

There have been numerous seizures of tusks and raw ivory in Italy. The lengths are sometimes spectacular. See "On the Trail" n°8, p. 68 (ref. 6), p. 89 (ref. 105), No. 12, p. 96 (ref. 128, 1.3 metres long, and ref. 130), n°23, p. 161 (ref. 111), n°24, p. 80 (ref. 113), n°27, p. 111 (ref. 133), n°28, p. 115 (ref. 114, 156 cm long), n°29, p. 40 (ref. 121), n°30, p. 39 (ref. 149), n°31, p. 40 (ref. 152 and 153), n°33, p. 57 (ref. 233), n°34, p. 47 (ref. 188, 189, and 190), n°35, p. 34 (ref. 132), n°36, p. 40 (ref. 126 and 127), n°38, p. 36 (ref. 129, 167, and 180 cm long), n°39, p. 25 (ref. 81), n°40, p. 35 (ref. 115), n°42, p. 25 (ref. 84), n°44, p. 27 (ref. 101), and n°45, p. 22 (ref. 2).

ITALY

September 17, 2025

Turin, Metropolitan City of Turin, Region of Piedmont, Italy

Seizure of 5 African elephant tusks, tusks from yesteryear, between 1.9 and 2.12 metres long, from a taxidermist. They are similar to the tusks of Isilo † and Masbambela † in South Africa and the tusks of Satao † in Kenya (see "On the Trail" n°1 p.32, n°4 p.84 and n°5 p.89).

ELEPHANTS AND RHINOCEROSSES

AFRICA

ZIMBABWE

Beginning of September 2025

Harare, Harare Province, Zimbabwe

Sentencing of Cong Yanzhong to 18 years in prison for trafficking rhino horns and raw ivory (see "On the Trail" n°47, p. 22, ref. 5).¹



AMERICA

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

October 2025

Los Angeles County, State of California, United States of America

Ten years after the signing of Assembly Bill 96, which bans the trade in elephant ivory and rhino horn throughout California regardless of their age, the market has not yet been fully cleaned up. Agents from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) law enforcement from the Special Operations Unit (SOU) are well aware of this and are keeping up the pressure. At least 9 rhino horns, several large carved tusks, and thousands of elephant ivory objects or pieces, as well as a sea turtle shell, were seized from a "business," with no further details available at this time.²

RHINOCEROSES



Black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*). Photo Wayne and Pam Osborn (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

Beginning of September 2025
Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, KwaZulu-Natal
Province, South Africa



New "maintenance" dehorning campaign underway in the park.

Dehorning rhinos in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi: see "On the Trail" n°45, p. 23, ref. 2.¹

September 8, 2025
Paulpietersburg, KwaZulu-Natal
Province, South Africa



Rangers discover 2 dead rhinos with their horns removed in a private reserve. A third injured rhino was found nearby. At the end of July, the reserve had already been raided by 3 poachers who killed a rhino and stole the horns before being arrested (see "On the Trail" n°47, p. 23, ref. 2).²

September 12, 2025
Skukuza, Kruger National Park,
Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



Freedom Mabilane and Tshifiwa Ramunashi, former rangers in the Houtboschrand section of Kruger National Park, are sentenced to 14 years in prison for poaching a rhino as part of a conspiracy. Tourists heard gunshots and raised the alarm via a park app. The 2 men claimed to have fired in self-defence to avoid being attacked by an elephant. A freshly killed rhino was found nearby. Ballistic tests, GPS decryption, and analysis of bloodstains on their uniforms formally contradicted their alibi.³

**September 18, 2025
Crocodile Bridge Section, Kruger National Park,
Mpumalanga Province, South Africa**

Pursued by a patrol, the 2 poachers were armed. One fled and disappeared into the sugar cane fields on the other side of the fence, and the other was wounded by a presumed shot fired in self-defence by the rangers. Two rhino horns were found in his backpack, along with a butcher's knife. He was taken to the nearest hospital. He will be brought before the Masoyi Periodical Court as soon as possible and charged with trespassing in Kruger Park, illegal hunting, possession of an unlicensed firearm, and possession of a dangerous weapon (the knife).⁴

**OPERATION THUNDER
September 19, 2025**

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

Rangers from the IZP (Intensive Protection Zone, in the south of the park) foiled a rhino poaching attempt. During the chase, one of the suspects fell and was arrested. He was carrying a firearm. His accomplices managed to escape.⁵

**OPERATION THUNDER
September 20, 2025**

Hlabisa, Kwazulu-Natal Province, South Africa

Three men preparing for a poaching expedition in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park were arrested thanks to a tip-off. A firearm with a silencer and ammunition were seized from under a mattress.⁶

**Beginning of October 2025
Limpopo Province, South Africa**

Hope for Wildlife Helicopter Services intervened to help a young rhino whose neck was caught and cut by a metal trap. After removing the trap and providing emergency care, the prognosis is favourable.⁷



© Hope for Wildlife Helicopter Services

OPERATION THUNDER

**October 4, 2025
Hlabisa, Kwazulu-Natal Province,
South Africa**



A poacher well known to authorities in several provinces was arrested as he was about to enter Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park. He had hidden a .375 calibre rifle under the bonnet of his car, a silencer in the air filter, and was also carrying a box of ammunition and 2 knives.⁸

**Sunday, October 5 and October 11,
2025**

**Bushmans Wildlife Reserve,
Alexandria, and Great Fish River Nature
Reserve, Eastern Cape Province, South
Africa**



- Poaching and amputation of both horns of a pregnant female rhino. The happy event was expected at the end of 2025.

- Poaching of a female black rhino. Her calf is safe and sound. The poachers managed to escape but were forced to abandon the 2 horns during the chase. For Mornay Viljoen, the province's wildlife director, these 2 poaching incidents in quick succession come as a shock. "It is a signal that the poachers are infiltrating the Eastern Cape." "It's rhino calving season at the moment and many adult females are walking around with foetuses inside them." "To lose a pregnant mother rhino is a double-blow, so we need to be extra vigilant."⁹

**Mid-October 2025
Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre,
Limpopo Province, South Africa**

It's preventive dehorning season for 5 juvenile rhinos. Sedatives, chainsaws, horn shards. A few grammes worth a small fortune. The horns are placed in a secure location under the control of a third party guarantor, but what happens to the shavings littering the ground?

"On the Trail" reported the seizure in China of 39.8 grammes of rhino horn shavings in a package from abroad (see n°33, p. 72, ref. 48). Based on a price of 55,000 US\$/kg, these shavings were worth 2,200 US\$.¹⁰



© Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre



© China Customs

Seizure in early August 2021, Daluo Border Crossing, Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. Border with Myanmar.

**October 31, 2025
Kimberley, Northern Cape Province,
South Africa**



The province's High Court, which specialises in environmental cases and was petitioned by Wicus Diedericks, a rhino ranch operator, ruled that the horns may be exported provided they are not used for commercial purposes, in accordance with Article 7 of CITES. In his defence speech, Diedericks stated that the costs of feeding, protecting, and breeding his white rhinos amount to 20 million rand (1.16 million US\$) annually. For Diedericks, "This is more than a legal win — it's a lifeline for rhinos and a bold step toward 21st-century conservation." However, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip. Diedericks' argument mirrors that of John Hume, who is currently on trial for attempting to circumvent the global ban on horn exports. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment intends to appeal the ruling and has long expressed its intention not to lift the global embargo until all measures taken to curb smuggling prove effective. However, the possibility that a proposal for the partial reopening of the global market could return to the negotiating table at the next CITES meeting in 2028 in Panama cannot be ruled out.¹¹

ANGOLA

**September 25, 2025
Cuvango, Huíla Province, Angola**



The massacre was discovered in the morning. The 2 black rhinos were lying on their sides, their horns removed. An internal plot at the Capunda Ranch was quickly suspected, and 3 men—one Angolan employee and 2 Namibians—were arrested. The 2 pairs of horns were destined for Namibia. Thanks to rigged suitcases, they would probably have ended up in China. The ranch employee cracked. One of the Namibians offered him 500,000 kwanzas (545 US\$) to facilitate the crime.¹²

KENYA

**September 2, 2025
Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Laikipia
County, Kenya**



Rescue of a black rhinoceros. The wire had wrapped itself twice around the right hind leg, like a barbed wire scarf around the metatarsal joint. He was anaesthetised from a helicopter. The prognosis is favourable, provided he is kept under close observation.¹³



**October 22, 2025
Solio Ranch, Laikipia County, Kenya**



The male with his magnificent horn (a unicorn in the savannah!) has a problem with his left hind leg, with barbed wire wrapped around it and embedded between the tarsus and metatarsus.



He had picked it up somewhere where it was lying on the ground. He was anaesthetised with etorphine and azaperone injected into his right shoulder. The barbed wire was cut with wire cutters and the circular wound was treated with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories. The prognosis is favourable. The ranch administration was reminded by the SWT/KWS mission: "remove any wires that could have been dropped around" on the ground or in the bushes.¹⁴

NAMIBIA

September 16, 2025

Onamutenya, Oshikoto Region, Namibia

Arrest of 2 men ages 28 and 41. The first was from Windhoek (700 km away), the second from the Okavango District (600 km away). They were attempting to enter Etosha National Park with a rifle equipped with a telescopic sight and silencer, 20 rounds of ammunition, 3 knives, 7 loaves of bread, and 12 cans of food. They are charged with conspiracy to poach rhinos and with possession of a firearm and ammunition without a permit.¹⁵

October 2, 2025

Okavango, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia

The head of wildlife rangers at KAZA (Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area) is in trouble. Willem Ponahazo is accused of colluding with rhino poachers. In April 2024, Ponahazo had a rifle delivered by courier to Windhoek, which was later seized from poachers who had just killed a rhino. An arrest warrant had been issued for him since December 2024. Upon his return from a study trip to the United Kingdom, he turned himself in at the police station. Initially, his request for release on bail was denied.¹⁶

Mid-October 2025

Okosongoro Safari Ranch, Erongo Region, Namibia

Discovery of 2 female rhinos killed recently, one white and one black. Their economic value is estimated at 300,000 and 500,000 Namibian dollars (17,300 US\$ and 29,000 US\$) respectively. The horns of the black rhino are missing.¹⁷

Mid-October 2025

Okonjati Wildlife Sanctuary, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia



After his mother was violently killed by humans, the little white rhinoceros was doomed. After wandering around for a few days, he was anaesthetised and put on an IV by Wildlife Vets Namibia, then transferred to the Mount Etjo Rhino Trust, a sanctuary founded in 2015 to deal with the increase in the number of orphaned rhinos in the country.¹⁸

October 19, 2025

Sorris-Sorris Conservancy, Khorixas, Kunene Region, Namibia

She was last seen alive on Saturday around 5 p.m. On Sunday, she was found dead with her horns amputated under a dead tree and a black tarp. She had been imported from Etosha National Park. She had given birth to 8 calves since 2015, and when she was poached by unknown individuals using an unknown method, she was carrying a foetus. Her 2 horns, whose weight has not been disclosed, are estimated to be worth 500,000 Namibian dollars (28,800 US\$).¹⁹

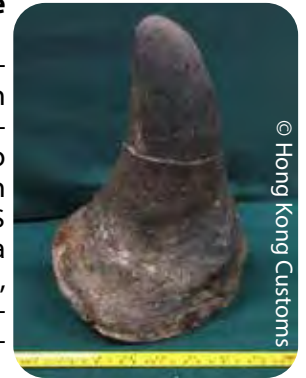
ASIA

CHINA

September 27, 2025

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

Seizure in a postal package declared to contain "ceramic gifts" and coming from France of a rhino horn weighing 2 kg with a value of 103,000 US\$ (55,000 US\$/kg). After a traceability investigation, customs authorities arrested a man believed to be involved in the smuggling.²⁰



INDIA

October 29, 2025

Jalpaiguri, Jalpaiguri District, State of West Bengal, India

Rikoch Narjari had already been convicted in April 2025 of ivory trafficking and sentenced to 4 years in prison and to pay a fine of 40,000 rupees (470 US\$). This time, he was sentenced to 7 years in prison and fined 100,000 rupees (1,127 US\$) for trafficking rhino horns between West Bengal and Assam (see "On the Trail" n°44, p. 34, ref. 25). His associate Lukas Basumatary was already sentenced to 6 years in prison and fined 40,000 rupees in March 2025 for trafficking a leopard skin (*Panthera pardus*, Appendix I) on June 3, 2024.²¹



INDONESIA

October 9, 2025

**Jambi City, Jambi Province,
Sumatra Island, Indonesia**

Sentencing of Sutrisno and Ramli, farmers, Satriya, a self-employed entrepreneur, and Raja Saudi H, a private sector employee, to 3 years in prison and to pay fines of 50 million rupiah (3,000 US\$), with an additional month in prison for non-payment payment, and 5,000 rupiah (0.3 US\$) in court costs for possessing and attempting to sell 1.36 kg of Sunda pangolin scales and a 600-gram Sumatran rhino horn in March 2025. The rhino horn was in a black plastic bag, and the pangolin scales were in a bag of shrimp chips inside a Toyota Fortuner.²²



MALAYSIA

October 15, 2025

Sepang, State of Selangor, Malaysia

The mountain of traffic gave birth to a prison mouse (see "On the Trail" n°34, p. 48, ref. 48). Mohamad Sukry Wahab, clearance agent, and Muhammad Hafizsan Naser, truck driver, were sentenced to 6 months in prison. In their Mitsubishi Fuso, police seized 50 rhinoceros horns and horn fragments from a package declared to contain "lobsters" after a chase at the exit of Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Experts revealed that 49 trophies came from white rhinos and one trophy came from a black rhino. This is the first time that traffickers have been convicted in Malaysia for smuggling African rhino horns. The value of the seizure was estimated at between 3.2 and 8 million ringgit (760,000 US\$ to 1.9 million US\$). At the time of the incident, the 2 men faced 3 years in prison. The leniency of the sentences, given the ecological and financial value of the seizure, is unlikely to deter wildlife gangs or curb the corruption that affects customs and other port and airport authorities in Malaysia.²³



NEPAL

September 8-9, 2025

**Bharatpur Prison,
Chitwan District;
Kathmandu Central
Jail, Kathmandu District,
Bagmati Province, Nepal**



The anti-corruption uprising led by Generation Z (those under 28) that brought down the government and sent the authorities into disarray left at least 76 people dead in 2 days. A collateral effect of the uprising was the escape of 15,000 prisoners, including some of the most notorious rhino poachers. Among those who benefited from this "early release" were, from Bharatpur Prison, Bindar Singh Praja, sentenced to 15 years in prison (see "On the Trail" n°33, p. 73, ref. 56), Ramesh Khati, Aita Singh Moktan, and Indra Bahadur Tamang, who trapped rhinos in pits in Chitwan National Park and sawed off their horns (see "On the Trail" n°43, p. 27, ref. 13), also sentenced to 15 years in prison. Three other rhino poachers, Arjun Sen Thakuri, Sitaram Thing (also involved in pit trapping), and Bishnu Bahadur Karki Chhetri, escaped from Kathmandu Central Prison, along with 3 pangolin scale traffickers, 2 traffickers of preputial glands of musk deer (*Moschus* spp., Appendix I or II), a trafficker of red pandas (*Ailurus fulgens*, Appendix I) and clouded leopard skins (*Neofelis nebulosa*, Appendix I), and an Indian national trafficking in turtles.

During this new period of instability, there are fears of increased poaching and smuggling of endangered species. During the Maoist insurgency (1996–2006) and the state of emergency, rhino poaching had reached record levels. The current political situation in Nepal, coupled with the Dashain festival (September 22–October 2), a festival honoring the Hindu goddess Durga, and Tihar (October 19–23), the festival of lights, is a new source of concern for forest rangers and wildlife conservationists.²⁴

THAILAND

September 6, 2025

Suvarnabhumi, Bangkok International Airport, Thailand

Hollow log technique variant (see "On the Trail" n°15 p. 98, n°19 p. 104 and n°23 p.68)

Seizure from the luggage of Thanh, a Vietnamese national travelling from Luanda (Angola) to Vientiane (Laos) via Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and Bangkok of a rhino horn and 4 fragments weighing a total of 6.86 kg that were concealed in 2 hollowed-out and hermetically sealed pieces of wood. The trap was uncovered thanks to the analysis of X-rays of Mr. Thanh's luggage.²⁵



VIET NAM

October 30, 2025

Hanoi City, Viet Nam

The Court of Appeal upholds the May 15, 2025, trial court ruling sentencing Cao Xuan Manh to 7 years in prison for rhino horn trafficking (see "On the Trail" n°46, p. 25, ref. 14).²⁶

