

ON_{the} TRAIL

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animals poaching and smuggling
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ON_{the} TRAIL

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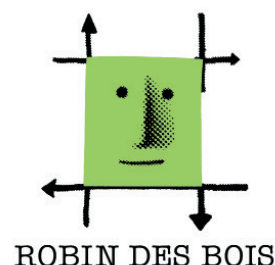
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NOTE AND ADVICE TO READERS

"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:

- 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

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RHINOCEROSES



Young white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*). Photo Michael Holthuysen (BY-NC 4.0)

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

December 3, 2025

Manguzi, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa

Dumisani Gwala was shot and killed at his home by 3 unidentified men. After 30 trial postponements, confessions, acts of defiance, and evidence of his involvement in the rhinoceros horn trafficking trade, he had been all but acquitted by the court, which on July 28, 2023, had simply sentenced him to a 6-month suspended prison term for resisting law enforcement officers. He was not spared by the cycle of revenge. His "career" was doggedly and courageously tracked by Jamie Joseph, director of Saving the Wild South Africa. Horn kingpins do not enjoy a peaceful retirement. Mister Big, whose real name is Petros Sidney Mabuza, suffered the same fate as Gwala in June 2021 (see "On the Trail" n°33, p. 65, ref. 20).¹ Dumisani Gwala, see "On the Trail" n°12, p. 71 (ref. 39), n°14, p. 63 (ref. 21) and p. 66 (ref. 41), n°18, p. 72 (ref. 31), n°19, p. 86 (ref. 20), n°20, p. 81 (ref. 15), n°21, p. 75 (ref. 17), n°31, p. 45 (ref. 15), n°32, p. 62 (ref. 18), and n°41, p. 37 (ref. 14).



December 4, 2025

Upington, Northern Cape Province, South Africa

Arrest of 3 men, ages 42 to 48, in possession of a rhinoceros horn, a handgun, and ammunition.²



Beginning of December 2025

KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa

Mandatory dehorning. While going about his daily activities and grazing on the savannah, the white rhinoceros became entangled in a trap around his frontal horn. He managed to free himself, but the metal noose had wrapped itself around the base of his horn. The rhinoceros was anaesthetised with a tranquilizer gun fired from a Heligistix helicopter, and veterinarian Dr. Rowan Leeming, with the help of 5 rangers, was forced to remove the horn before gaining access to the metal wire and extracting it. Antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, and ointments were administered to treat the wounds.³



December 8, 2025

Hartbeesfontein, North West Province, South Africa

Early in the morning, an armed robbery took place at the Voi Game Lodge, operated by Vietnamese interests, in which 98 rhinoceros horns and 50,000 rand in cash, equivalent to 3,000 US\$, were stolen.⁴

December 11, 2025

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

Bethuel Baloyi is no longer on the run. He was the accomplice of million Masilane, who was sentenced to 16 years in prison for poaching 2 white rhinos on March 28, 2020, in the Pretoriuskop section of Kruger National Park (see "On the Trail" n°44, p. 31, ref. 7). Bethuel Baloyi, who had been released on bail, had failed to appear for all court summonses. He was recently arrested in the Hluhluwe Reserve in connection with a new rhinoceros poaching case, the investigation of which is ongoing. For the 2020 poaching incident, he has just been sentenced, like Masilane, to 37 years in prison on the same charges. Since some of the sentences were consolidated, his actual prison term has been reduced to 16 years.⁵



REPEATED OFFENCE

December 12, 2025

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

Sentencing of Faro Zitha to 22 years in prison: 8 years for possession of a firearm with the serial number removed, 4 years for possession of a weapon with the intent to commit a crime, 4 years for criminal conspiracy, 2 years for trespassing in Kruger National Park, 2 years for possession of ammunition, 1 for violating immigration law, and 1 for possession of a dangerous weapon (an axe or a knife). Since some of the sentences were combined, the total prison term is 10 years.⁶



January 20, 2026

Ficksburg, Free State Province, South Africa. Border with Lesotho.



At 2:15 a.m., police inspected the car in a gas station parking lot and discovered a package containing 4 suspected rhinoceros horns, as well as a zip-top plastic bag with 50 small gemstones and a gold nugget, the authenticity of which must be verified. The driver, a foreign national, said he had been hired to transport the zip-top bag and the taped cardboard box from Johannesburg to Maseru in Lesotho (400 km) without knowing exactly what was inside. He was arrested in Ficksburg near the border with Lesotho.⁷

KENYA

Beginning of November 2025

Kajiado, Kajiado County, Kenya

The man from Maua (population 22,000) in Meru County had obtained a small rhinoceros horn (100 grammes) several months earlier. Tracked by the Big Life Foundation, he first tried to sell it in Malili, Machakos County, along the road to Mombasa, and then travelled to Kajiado, where he was caught red-handed by the KWS while attempting to sell it in the parking lot of a gas station.⁸

NAMIBIA

Beginning of November 2025

Omaruru District, Erongo Region, Namibia

Discovery of the decomposing carcass of a black rhinoceros on a ranch. The animal had been fatally shot in the head. The poachers, who fled the scene, removed the horns.⁹

November 2025

Near Etosha National Park, Oshikoto Region, Namibia

Arrest of Paulus Panduleni Nikodemus in possession of 2 rhinoceros horns with an estimated value of 165,000 Namibian dollars (10,500 US\$).¹⁰

December 10, 2025

Kalkrand, Hardap Region, Namibia

A serial killer, cattle thief, and oryx poacher, Derick Brockerhoff has a profile that is, fortunately, atypical. He was arrested at a traffic checkpoint on the B1 road with a rifle, 13 rounds of ammunition, and hunting gear.¹¹

ASIA

CHINA

November 2025

Hangzhou Xiaoshan International Airport, Zhejiang Province, China



Fragments and powder of rhinoceros horn in 4 small bags were detected by X-ray screening in the suitcase of an arriving passenger. A total of 461.52 grammes. Subsequent analysis revealed that the contraband came from a black rhinoceros.¹²

EUROPE

IRELAND

December 2, 2025

Rathkeale, County Limerick, Ireland

Eleven raids were carried out by the local police and the National Guard in the stronghold of the travelling community known as the Rathkeale Rovers. At a location - it is unclear whether it was a caravan, a camper van or a permanent or borrowed second home - luxury handbags, designer watches and rhino horns - it is unclear whether these are counterfeit - were seized, along with 400,000 € (463,500 US\$) in cash (believed to be genuine), and in several bank accounts.

The scams attributed to the Rathkeale Rovers and their followers are sometimes violent and threatening, sometimes colourful, and have often led them to police custody, court cases, prison sentences and extraditions, in particular from Ireland to the United States. To grasp the ever-changing world of the Rathkeale Rovers - experts in antiques, second-hand tar, fake whitewash, the sale of DS 19s that no longer exist, and stolen or exchanged rhino horns - one must read the regional newspapers in France and across the European Union that follow their trail, often without naming them. By contrast, 22 issues of "On the Trail" follow them very closely, referring to them by their patriarchal and matriarchal names, sometimes getting lost - like customs officers - since they have the privilege of possessing two identities and a terrible habit of multiplying homonyms. According to The Journal, based in Dublin, they have reportedly become masters of cryptocurrency scams - which is right up their street - and may be linked to migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean, which does not seem to look like their usual style. On the other hand, the Irish Times reported in 2021 that the Rathkeale Rovers were the first to develop an app that, for a few hundred euros, issued fake negative Covid-19 test results - which does seem to fit their skills and their bargain sense. Indeed, Europol has confirmed this.

Between November 2024 and August 2026, a spate of 12 thefts of jewellery sets and gold nuggets, porcelain, diamonds, silverware and curiosities took place in museums in France, the Netherlands, Austria and Spain. This recalls the modus operandi of the Rathkeale Rovers. The total value of the losses exceeds 100 million euros (116 million US\$).¹³

Rathkeale Rovers, see Index.

Freelance journalist Hugo Nazarenko-Sas has just published *Le Gang des Voleurs de cornes* (The Horn Thieves' Gang) with Marchialy Editions, a story that gets off to a flying start and ends with the Thoiry zoo mystery. Available in French only.