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Kenya: Two arrested with 77kgs of elephant tusks worth Sh12m in Samburu

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By Cyrus Ombati, The Star

Two men were on Tuesday arrested while trafficking 36 pieces of elephant tusks weighing 77 kilogrammes valued at Sh12 million in Maralal, Samburu county.

The men were flagged down on the Maralal-Kisima Road on November 14 at about 9 am.

The team who conducted the arrest included police and officials from the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Police said a search conducted on a car that the two were using realised the 36 pieces of elephant tusks indicating up to ten elephants were killed to get them.

The source of the ivory is yet to be known but it is suspected they got them from elephants killed in the nearby national parks including Samburu, police said.

The men were detained at the local police station ahead of a planned arraignment.

Police said they will be charged with the offence of being in Possession of Wildlife Trophies of Endangered Species Contrary to Section 92(4) of the Wildlife Conservation Management Act 2013.

The recovery comes despite stringent measures in place to address the menace of poaching in the country and region.

In July 2023, two herders accused of illegally possessing elephant tusks were given stringent bond terms of Sh1 million each after being charged.

They were accused of dealing in ivory and allegedly found with Sh2 million worth of elephant tusks by KWS detectives.

The two men were charged with dealing in wildlife trophies of an endangered species worth Sh2 million without a permit contrary to Section 92(2) of the Wildlife Conservation Act.

They were allegedly jointly found dealing in two pieces of elephant tusk weighing six kilogrammes concealed in a brownish safari bag without a permit or other lawful exemption.

The two allegedly committed the crime on June 13, 2023, in the Mwembe Tayari area within Mombasa County.

Elephant tusks fetch a fortune in the black market as a surge in demand for ivory in the East continues to fuel the illicit trade in elephant tusks, especially from Africa.

Officials say despite a ban on the international ivory trade, African elephants are still being poached in large numbers.

As part of efforts to stop the menace, Kenya has started using high-tech surveillance equipment, including drones, to track poachers and keep tabs on elephants and rhinos.

KWS and stakeholders have put in place mechanisms to eradicate all forms of wildlife crime, particularly poaching.

These mechanisms include enhanced community education, interagency collaboration, and intensive intelligence-led operations, among others.

These efforts led to zero rhino poaching in Kenya in 2020-the first time in about two decades. At least 20,000 elephants are killed annually in Africa for their ivory.

This translates to 55 elephants killed daily or one elephant killed every 26 minutes with a population of 35,000 elephants.

On April 30, 2016, Kenya set ablaze 105 tonnes of elephant ivory and 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn.

Former President Uhuru Kenyatta led world leaders and conservationists in burning the remains of 6,500 elephants and 450 rhinos killed for their tusks and horns.

Parliament has also passed strict anti-poaching laws and the government has beefed up security at parks to stop poaching, which threatens the vital tourism industry.

Regionally, Kenya has also emerged as a major transit route for ivory destined for Asian markets from eastern and central Africa.

The illegal ivory trade is mostly fuelled by demand in Asia and the Middle East, where elephant tusks and rhino horns are used to make ornaments and traditional medicines.

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