



Joint Operation Leads to Four Arrests and Major Seizure of Pangolin Scales in Liberia

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In a coordinated effort, the Special Wildlife Investigations Unit (SWIU), supported by Focused Conservation and the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC), successfully conducted a joint operation resulting in the arrest of four suspects and the seizure of 525 kilograms of pangolin scales in Monrovia, Liberia, on 10 July 2024. The SWIU is comprised of officers from the Liberian National Police, Forestry Development Authority (FDA) and the Liberia Revenue Authority Customs Department and is mentored in Liberia by Focused Conservation.

The operation was initiated based on intelligence provided by the Wildlife Justice Commission, as part of an ongoing investigation into the trafficking of pangolin scales from Africa to Asia. Intelligence analysis had



identified links between one of the key Liberian suspects and a pangolin scale trafficking network in Nigeria.

This operation also underscores the successful cooperation between the Wildlife Justice Commission, Focused Conservation, and all relevant mandated authorities and partners, ensuring the seamless execution of this critical mission.

“This operation marks our first collaboration with the Liberia National Police, SWIU, and Focused Conservation, resulting in the arrest of a significant African pangolin scale trafficker operating in Liberia. We look forward to further cooperation with Focused Conservation and other like-minded organisations to combat wildlife trafficking in Liberia and across key African export hubs,” said Olivia Swaak-Goldman, Executive Director of the Wildlife Justice Commission.

“This operation represents the largest reported seizure of pangolin scales in Liberia and follows other successful operations there where over 1.4 tonnes of pangolin scales have been seized since the Special Wildlife Investigations Unit was formed in May 2023. We commend the SWIU of the Liberia National Police for their ongoing commitment to fighting wildlife crime and vow to continue supporting them in investigating, arresting, and prosecuting wildlife traffickers,” stated Tim Santel, Senior Advisor – Wildlife Trafficking Programs at Focused Conservation.

Pangolins are considered a delicacy in parts of Africa and Asia. They are highly prized for their meat and unique scales, particularly in China and Vietnam, where the scales are used in traditional medicine. All eight pangolin species are protected under international law, and three species are listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Overexploitation for illegal trade represents the greatest threat to all pangolin species.

Current intelligence indicates a notable disruption among Vietnamese, Nigerian, and Mozambican criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking. The trade, once seen as low risk-high reward, is increasingly perceived as a high-risk criminal activity.

The Wildlife Justice Commission and Focused Conservation remain steadfast in their commitment to supporting law enforcement agencies worldwide in the ongoing efforts to disrupt and dismantle criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking, ensuring the protection of vulnerable species from being driven to the brink of extinction.

