

## Most-wanted environmental fugitives list leads to arrest of ivory suspect

News - Environment | 2014-12-18

Page no: 9



Arthur Neslen

**BEN Simasiku, a 31-year-old suspected ivory smuggler, has been arrested in Zambia after the first-ever Interpol public appeal, dubbed to track down nine environmental fugitives.**

Simasiku had been on the run since a shoot-out between wildlife officials and 13 alleged poachers in Botswana's Chobe National Park, on the Zambian border in July. One suspected poacher was killed in the gunfight.

Botswana's authorities reportedly recovered recovered live ammunition, 34 ivory tusks, four axes, four elephant tails, 12 bags of assorted game meat and a digital weighing scale at the scene.

Stefano Carvelli, the head of Interpol's fugitive investigative support unit told the Guardian: "Since we launched our global public appeal for information, Interpol has received many tips regarding the fugitives sought. The arrest of Ben Simasiku highlights the important role the public can play in helping police locate them. We encourage people worldwide to remain vigilant and to assist in bringing the remaining fugitives to justice."

Simasiku was captured by the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA)'s intelligence and investigations unit on 2 December, and will now face trial in Zambia.

"The Zambian authorities are to be congratulated for acting quickly and capturing this criminal," said Nathan Gichohi, an

officer for the African Wildlife Foundation. "It is important we focus on stopping the middlemen, traffickers and kingpins of the ivory and rhino horn trade as much as the poachers."

Along with with Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Zambia hosts Africa's largest elephant populations. But since the 1960s, poachers are thought to have killed 90% of Zambia's 250,000 elephants, and all of its 3,500 black rhino.

As rhino extinctions have spread, the vast majority of rhino poaching now takes place in just two countries, Zimbabwe and South Africa. Forest elephant populations in Africa meanwhile fell by around 62% between 2002 and 2011. -The Guardian