

Rhino horn suspects remanded in custody

News - National | 2016-07-19

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THE three men who were arrested on Friday with freshly sawn-off rhino horns at a mobile police roadblock outside Otavi were ordered to remain in custody with their first court appearance yesterday.

Suspects Japyangula Tjihange (33), Tjingee Kaukamburua (29), and Paulus Tjambiru (27) had their rights to legal representation explained to them when they appeared before Otavi magistrate Clara Mwilima yesterday morning on charges of possession of controlled wildlife products and hunting specially protected game.

Tjihange and Tjambiru indicated their intention to apply for state-funded lawyers, while Kaukamburua said he would acquire the services of a private lawyer.

Mwilima remanded the suspects in custody, and postponed the case to 13 September for further police investigations and to afford the three men time to acquire legal representation.

Prosecutor Johanna Hamunyela opposed the granting of bail on the grounds that two other suspects are still on the run. Tjihange, Kaukamburua and Tjambiru were not asked to plead.

Otjozondjupa regional police spokesperson, warrant officer Maureen Mbeha, on Sunday said the police found two large rhino horns and a small one in the possession of the accused.

The horns were described as fresh, referring to indications of moisture in the fibres and traces of blood.

She said the three men were arrested at approximately 21h00 on Friday evening, about 40 kilometres west of Otavi on the Outjo-Otavi gravel road.

Mbeha said the police had to chase after a white Toyota double cab pick-up in which the suspects were travelling, after it failed to stop at a roadblock.

She said as the police were catching up with the vehicle, one of the passengers threw out the bag which contained three rhino horns.

The police managed to stop the vehicle, but two of the five occupants jumped out and fled on foot into the bush.

The accused were arrested after the police searched the vehicle and found a camping tent, blankets, containers of water, tinned food, seven live bullets for a .303 hunting rifle and a loaded 9 millimetre pistol.

The police suspect the men had just returned from a poaching excursion, as the rhino horns were still fresh.

Their vehicle was impounded at the Otavi Police Station.

- Nampa