

Chinese foursome convicted over rhino horns

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by Werner Menges



FOUR Chinese citizens who were accused of having tried to smuggle a hoard of rhino horns and one leopard skin out of Namibia in March 2014 were found guilty on two charges in the Windhoek Regional Court today.

Magistrate Alexis Diergaardt convicted the four accused of two counts of attempting to export controlled wildlife products after she found in her verdict that it had been proven that they acted in common purpose when an attempt was made to take two suitcases containing 14 rhino horns and a leopard skin out of Namibia on 24 March 2014.

She also found that the four – Wang Hui (41), Pu Xuexin (51), Li Zhibing (55) and Li Xiaoliang (32) – jointly planned the offences of which they were convicted.

Magistrate Diergaardt rejected the versions of Pu and the two Lis that they visited Namibia only as tourists and to acquaint themselves with the construction business in the country. She also found that Wang, who told the court he was a businessman with permanent residence in Namibia, acted as a caretaker for his three co-accused when they made preparations to try to take the two suitcases containing wildlife contraband out of the country.

Pu and the two Lis were arrested at Hosea Kutako International Airport after the contents of the suitcases were detected by police officers. Wang was arrested and added as an accused to the case of his three compatriots in May last year.

The detection of the rhino horns and leopard skin and consequent arrest of the four men was seen as a major success that the Namibian Police scored in its attempts to battle the increasing incidence of wildlife crimes, including the poaching of rare and endangered species of animals, in Namibia.

Following the delivery of the verdict, the start of the presentencing phase of the trial was postponed to Friday next week (23 September).

The four men remain in custody.