



Four more rhino horns seized

Two Chinese, two Namibians arrested

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JANA-MARI SMITH

Undercover police operations last week led to the arrest of two Namibians near Outapi and two Chinese nationals in Windhoek for illegal possession of two rhino horns in each case.

A joint operation lasting most of last week between Namibian intelligence units, the Namibian Police Protected Resource Unit (PRU) and City Police led to the raid on Thursday night of the Eros flat rented by the two Chinese, during which two rhino horns wrapped in aluminium foil as well as a cache of weapons and ammunition were confiscated and the two men arrested.

A source close to the investigation confirmed that the items found alongside the rhino horns could be described as a rhino poaching kit, including hunting rifles, bullets and other items not yet made public by the police.

Investigations and tests continue, and police over the weekend said it was not yet clear where the rhino horns found at the flat in Eros originated from or how old they were.

Police over the weekend dismissed a report that they were linked to a case of poaching of white rhinos in the Gobabis area in December, saying further tests were needed before their origin could be determined.

The two Chinese men, whose names cannot be published until their first court appearance before the Windhoek Magistrate's Court today, had reportedly entered the country from Zambia at some point in the past month.

The Chinese men had allegedly been seen at a popular gambling establishment in Windhoek during the week, flashing large amounts of cash, sources told Namibian Sun. Official confirmation could not be obtained from the police.

At Outapi, Linda Johannes (32-years-old) and Victor Sihani (52) remain behind bars following their first appearance before the Outapi Magistrate's Court on Thursday after their arrest earlier that week at a cattle post in the region.

The two were caught during a sting operation, after they attempted to sell a pair of rhino horns, police said on Friday.

Johannes and Sihani claimed they had found the horns in the belongings of Johannes's deceased father, which he had hidden with other personal items at a cattle post in the area.

Their case was postponed until March 7.

Police said a preliminary investigation revealed that the horns appear quite old, though further details were not yet available.

On Friday the head of Namibia's police force, Lieutenant-General Sebastian Ndeitunga, said the recent arrests were a clear sign that Namibia's call on foreign and local criminals to cease poaching was falling on deaf ears.

"They do not respect our appeal to stop being involved in poaching," he said.

Ndeitunga said it was frustrating and "totally unacceptable" that many Namibians were willing pawns for international crime syndicates and were helping to destroy the country's protected resources.

Ndeitunga also reached out to the judiciary, appealing to officers of the court to assist in addressing the rhino poaching

epidemic by handing down "proper sentences" when guilty verdicts are handed down.

Addressing widespread concerns that poachers have been granted bail on numerous occasions despite the risk of returning to illegal activities and intimidation of witnesses, among other concerns, he said it was crucial that court officials familiarise themselves with "what is going on in the country and with the seriousness of poaching in Namibia".

He emphasised that law enforcement would not interfere with the decisions of court officials, but noted that the risk of interference with ongoing investigations into poaching was high when suspects linked to poaching activities were released on bail.

Ndeitunga thanked and praised the women and men in uniform who are "hard at work" investigating the complex poaching network in the country.

He said the law enforcement teams would "leave no stone unturned" and there would be "no mercy" for anyone guilty of poaching.