



Namibia turns into poachers' paradise

Named as priority country in smuggling rhino horns

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Namibia has been identified as a significant link in the international rhino-horn smuggling network.

This follows a surge in rhino poaching in Namibia since 2013. Previously the country was not identified in this trafficking route.

This is according to a rapid assessment of smuggling routes and techniques used in the illicit trade in African rhino horn.

The report draws on 456 records in TRAFFIC's global database of wildlife seizures covering the period 2010 to June 2017.

It examines the complex and dynamic smuggling routes used by networks ferrying their contraband from Africa to Asia, identifies hotspots and presents an overview of smuggling methods employed by rhino-horn traffickers.

According to the report more than 7 100 rhinos have been killed by poachers in Africa over the past decade.

In 2016 alone there were 1 160 documented incidents of rhino poaching in six African states.

While most of the losses were experienced in South Africa, significant losses were also recorded in Namibia and Zimbabwe over the past three years, raising concern about geographical shifts in poaching.

The report says the smuggling routes employed by criminal networks trafficking rhino horn are complex and dynamic, exploiting weaknesses in border controls and law enforcement capacity constraints to provide a steady supply of rhino horn to Asian black markets.

"They span countries and continents, passing through multiple airports and legal jurisdictions. It is a task made easier for criminals by fragmented enforcement responses hamstrung by bureaucracy, insufficient international cooperation and corruption."

From 2010 to June 2017, at least 2 149 horns, weighing more than five tonnes, were seized by law enforcement agencies globally.

South Africa accounted for the bulk of the seizures, followed by China.

"Vietnam, Mozambique, Hong Kong and Kenya also reported 15 or more seizures from 2010 to June 2017."



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse-turns-into-poachers-paradise2017-10-040.jpg>)

CONTRABAND: Seized rhino horn of Namibian origin. Photo: ELLANIE SMIT

Qatar, Thailand, the USA, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Malaysia, Cambodia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Nigeria and the European Union (EU) are also significant links in the illegal supply chain.

The available evidence suggests that, over time, trade routes have become more convoluted as syndicates attempt to evade detection.

The smugglers appear to move away from direct shipments between source and consumer countries and make use of various transit countries before reaching destinations in China and Vietnam.

“The majority of rhino horn shipments originate in southern Africa, particularly South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Countries or territories that have been used as export or transit points for the illegal rhino horn trade include Cambodia, Ethiopia, the EU, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Qatar, Singapore, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates. There have been several seizures of rhino horn along these transit routes since last year.”

Numerous methods are used to smuggle the contraband and evade detection. Whole horns are cut into smaller pieces, concealed inside machinery and hi-fi speakers, disguised as curios or toys, worked into beads and bracelets, wrapped in foil and coated in toothpaste or shampoo to defeat x-ray machines and mask the stench of decay, hidden in box wine cartons and in consignments of timber and cashew nuts, to list a few examples.

According to the report of particular concern is new evidence that some criminal networks of Chinese origin, operating in South Africa, have begun processing and working rhino horn locally before smuggling the products to consumers in Asia.

These syndicates have begun manufacturing bracelets and beads, cutting horn into rough “disks” and packaging offcuts and rhino horn powder locally to facilitate smuggling efforts, evade detection at airports and supply readymade products to consumers in Asia.

Should these methods become more widespread, it is likely to significantly heighten the law enforcement challenge in Africa and along the trade chain to Asia.

A total of 27 rhino have been poached in Namibia this year.

Altogether 59 rhinos were poached last year and 95 rhinos in 2015, 56 in 2014 and 9 in 2013.

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