

- [HOME PAGE](#)
- [POLICE AND CRIME](#)
- SYNDICATES DIVERSIFY ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES



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- **POLICE AND CRIME**

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Wildlife products are smuggled along with other goods

A report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime shows that wildlife crime in southern and eastern Africa is closely linked to other forms of organized crime, such as drug trafficking and money laundering.

Elvira Hattingh

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By Elvira Hattingh, Windhoek

Law enforcement agencies in Namibia, Mozambique and Zambia are becoming increasingly vigilant when it comes to the illegal smuggling of abalone (sea slugs), among other things, through their countries. There is increasing evidence that the same companies and individuals involved in this smuggling are also involved in the export of other illegal wildlife products and other illegal activities. Accordingly, various forms of crime appear to be linked to the illegal wildlife trade. The same syndicates involved in the illicit trade in gems, gold, drugs and stolen transit money and sea slugs in southern Africa are also believed to be involved in wildlife crime and the smuggling of turtles, pangolins, rhinoceroses and ivory, among others. This emerges from a Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) research article on the convergence of wildlife crime and other forms of transnational organized crime in East and Southern Africa. Alastair Nelson's article was published last week. Nelson is a senior analyst at GI-TOC and is recognized as an expert on wildlife crime, corruption and organized crime. He has been involved in combating wildlife crime in East Africa, Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa for more than 30 years. Alastair Nelson's article was published last week. Nelson is a senior analyst at GI-TOC and is recognized as an expert on wildlife crime, corruption and organized crime. He has been involved in combating wildlife crime in East Africa, Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa for more than 30 years. Alastair Nelson's article was published last week. Nelson is a senior analyst at GI-TOC and is recognized as an expert on wildlife crime, corruption and organized crime. He has been involved in combating wildlife crime in East Africa, Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa for more than 30 years.

As for Namibia, Nelson says he has conducted extensive interviews with the Blue Rhino Task Force and the Forestry and Fisheries Directorate of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism. According to the report, it is rare for crime to coincide as early as the poaching of wildlife. "This means that most poachers are not hardened criminals involved in various types of organized crime. One exception, however, is rhino poaching in South Africa and southern Mozambique. There is mounting evidence that rhino poachers are also involved in transit robberies, blowing up ATMs and lending firearms to criminal groups. that corruption and money

laundering are fundamental to organized crime. Therefore, investigation and countermeasures should be an integral part of the fight against crime. "Identifying corruption, as well as corrupt intermediaries, at the centers where illicit products are smuggled offers an opportunity to better understand other forms of crime, crime networks and methods," Nelson said.

He says wildlife crimes are generally a low risk for syndicates and the penalties are lower compared to other forms of serious crime. Some criminal networks first "test" wildlife product smuggling routes and methods before using them to smuggle other illegal products to access," says Nelson. "High-value wildlife products have become another valuable commodity to be acquired and smuggled by organized criminal networks." According to Nelson, international syndicates are diversifying the smuggling trade in wildlife products because it increases their profits, spread their risks, lower their operating costs, and adjust quickly based on demand, all while increasing their revenues. Nelson completed research for his latest article between January 2021 and August 2022.