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SOUTH AFRICA

Lion teeth and claws seized as wildlife squad swoops on Vietnamese suspect

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A Vietnamese national has been arrested for illegal wildlife trade and illegal possession of a firearm.

Image: Nemar74 / 123RF Stock Photo

Authorities have recovered lion teeth and claws from a suspected illegal wildlife trader.

The Vietnamese man was arrested during raids in Bela-Bela and Pretoria after a four-month probe by analysts and wildlife investigators. The suspect was also arrested for illegal possession of a firearm.

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A joint team comprised of the Green Scorpions from the department of environment, forestry and fisheries (Deff), the Limpopo department of economic development, environment and tourism, the Gauteng department of agriculture and rural development and SANParks conducted the raid on Thursday.

In a statement on Saturday, Deff said search and seizure warrants were “executed simultaneously at a Vietnamese-owned farm near Bela-Bela in Limpopo and at two storage units in Pretoria”.

The Vietnamese man who was arrested appeared in the Bela-Bela regional court on Friday and the case was postponed due to the need for an interpreter.

“The man has been charged with illegal possession of a threatened species in terms of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act,” said the statement.

“The joint investigation team seized 4.19kg of lion teeth, 680g of lion claws and more than 60kg of processed animal products believed to be lion gelatin. An illegal firearm was also confiscated.

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“The collaborative nature of this operation has once again proven the importance of an integrated approach to investigations. The valuable assistance of the private sector in this matter is also highly appreciated.”

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