

# 30,000 Animals Rescued from Illegal Captivity in the Largest Wildlife Trafficking Raid in History

By **Andy Corbley** - Dec 15, 2025



*Poaching suspects and the elephant ivory they were holding in Angola – credit, INTERPOL, released*

INTERPOL recently [executed](#) the largest-ever edition of its annual series of coordinated of [operations](#) to dismantle criminal shipments and networks of trafficked and poached wildlife.

Called Operation Thunder, some 30,000 live animals were seized in 4,620 raids across 134 countries, 30% more than last year.

INTERPOL identified 1,100 suspects and issued 69 notices of criminal activity to participating nations' police forces.

Operation Thunder took place between September 15th and October 15th. It included law enforcement agencies like national police, customs, border security, and forestry and wildlife authorities.

In terms of live animals awaiting transfer or sale into illegal captivity, the operation rescued 6,160 birds, 2,040 terrapins, 1,150 reptiles, 208 primates, 49 pangolins, 10 big cats, and some 19,000 other species, including more infrequently trafficked mammals, fish, amphibians, and a notably larger number of arthropods (insects, arachnids, etc.)

Far larger in number and tonnage was the animal parts and derivatives that were seized, such as shark fins, pangolin scales, elephant ivory, tortoise shell, and more.

Encouragingly though, in the largest-ever police bust of wildlife trafficking, merely 7 rhino horns were found amid over 100,000 seized objects, suggesting rhino poaching control is seeing success.

Indeed, large charismatic animals and their body parts are less often found in these annual raids than they used to be. At the same time, increases in exotic arthropods, as well as timber, show the flexibility of poachers. 14,000 tons of illegally logged tree timber were confiscated across the participating nations. This is believed to be as much as one-third of the entire illegal timber market.

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Months of preparation for Operation Thunder 2025 centered on the exchange of information, the sharing of actionable intelligence and the coordination of cross-border investigations among participating countries and regions, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization.

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Beyond the immediate arrests and seizures, the intelligence gathered during what is the 9th edition of Operation Thunder will help map global criminal networks. These insights will

enable law enforcement agencies worldwide to refine their strategies, anticipate emerging criminal tactics and disrupt illicit supply chain activity, ensuring a sustained and effective response to transnational wildlife crime.

INTERPOL did not give estimates on the total valuation of the seizures, but the trafficked goods from just Tanzania exceeded half a million US dollars, suggesting that criminal networks would have lost 7, even 8-figure amounts in illicit revenues.

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