

# Nigeria arrests suspected pangolin trafficking kingpin on the run

Authorities in Nigeria have arrested the suspected kingpin of a transnational pangolin trafficking network, the latest in a series of high-profile wildlife busts in the country.

Shamsideen Abubakar was linked to a September 2021 case in which authorities seized 1,009.5 kilograms (2,226 pounds) of scales in Lagos, estimated to have come from at least 5,451 pangolins. Two of his associates, Sunday Ebenyi and Salif Sandwidi, were arrested at the time, but Abubakar himself remained on the run until now.

The arrest was the result of a collaboration between Nigerian authorities and Netherlands-based NGO the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC).

“The arrest sends a strong signal to Nigeria’s illegal wildlife trafficking network that arrest warrants will be strongly pursued,” Nigeria’s National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) said in a [press release](#).

Abubakar’s arrest follows two high-profile busts in Nigeria over the last two years. Each resulted in the seizure of [several tons](#) of [pangolin scales](#) and the arrest of suspected wildlife trafficking [kingpins](#), including Chinese and [Vietnamese](#) nationals.

Pangolin scales are coveted in East Asia for use in traditional medicine, and the meat is [eaten](#) in Nigeria. Selling pangolins is banned in the country and internationally, but they continue to be sold on the black market for a hefty price.

Trafficking has driven all eight known pangolin species to the brink of extinction: three are listed as critically endangered, three as endangered and two as vulnerable.

The high profits and low risks involved in such wildlife crime attract transnational criminal [gangs to Nigeria](#), a major [illegal wildlife trade hub](#) in West Africa.

To disrupt wildlife trafficking networks, Nigerian agencies partnered with WJC in 2021 to conduct long-term investigations. By 2025, that partnership had resulted in seizures of more than 25 metric tons of pangolin scales, more than a ton of elephant ivory, and the arrests of 42 suspected traffickers, with 12 convictions, according to WJC [data](#).

“What we are seeing in Nigeria is the result of sustained, intelligence-led enforcement and strong institutional commitment,” Olivia Swaak-Goldman, WJC’s executive director, said in a [press release](#). “The suspect thought he could evade justice, but our investigators never give up.”

Mark Ofua, West Africa representative for WildAfrica, called the arrest a “landmark victory for conservation” in an email to Mongabay. He added such high-level arrests can help authorities probe further into financial records and trafficking networks. Moreover, the

coordinated arrest across multiple agencies is “a model that must be emulated at all levels,” he said.

Nigeria says it has resolved to weed out wildlife trafficking. NESREA head Innocent Barikor said in a press release his agency is “determined to ensure that Nigeria is not a safe haven for wildlife crime.” He added they will ensure “every seizure, every arrest, and every conviction is pursued with unrelenting commitment until this illicit trade is eradicated from our shores.”

***Banner Image:*** *A black-bellied pangolin rescued from poachers, released by the Sangha Pangolin Project in the Central African Republic. Image by [Rod Cassidy via iNaturalist](#) (CC BY-NC)*

