

Joint operation by Singapore and South Africa leads to 55kg rhino horn seizure in Johannesburg

The operation was launched after Singapore intercepted a "suspicious shipment" that bore similarities to an earlier rhinoceros horn seizure on Nov 8.

SINGAPORE: A shipment containing 55.4kg of rhinoceros horns has been seized in Johannesburg after a joint operation between Singapore and South African authorities, the National Parks Board (NParks) said on Tuesday (Dec 30).

Authorities also uncovered 26.2kg of lion and tiger bones, skulls and claws. Two Nigerian men were arrested and charged in South Africa for breaching the country's Biodiversity Act, which prohibits restricted activities involving listed threatened or protected species.

The operation was triggered after a "suspicious shipment" from South Africa was flagged at Singapore Changi Airport on Nov 11.

The shipment bore similarities to an [earlier seizure on Nov 8](#) in Singapore that contained 35.7kg of rhinoceros horns and 150kg of other animal parts that had been due for Laos.

After examining the shipment on Nov 11, NParks worked with South Africa's Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (DPCI) for a "controlled return" to the country to conduct further investigations.

Authorities then traced the shipment to a storage facility in Johannesburg, where four boxes containing the rhinoceros horns and lion and tiger bones were found.

"The recovered horns and animal parts are believed to be part of a broader transnational trafficking network responsible for smuggling wildlife products from South Africa to other foreign markets," said NParks on Tuesday.

"The decision by NParks to initiate and facilitate a controlled return of the shipment to South Africa enabled the DPCI to conduct investigations at the source country with the potential to identify and dismantle the broader criminal network beyond intercepting a single shipment in another country."

NParks said the return of the suspicious shipment required "extensive multinational cooperation" to ensure that it could be tracked and monitored.

"This approach demonstrates the importance of international cooperation in combating transnational wildlife crime, where targeting the criminal networks at their source can yield more significant long-term results than isolated seizures," said NParks.

NParks' senior director of wildlife trade, Dr Anna Wong, said during a media briefing that the Nov 11 shipment was not bound for Singapore as a final destination.

She said it could not confirm if any arrests were made in Singapore in relation to that shipment or if the horns seized in Johannesburg were destined for Singapore, as investigations are ongoing.

The Singapore Police Force's Commercial Affairs Department is also looking into possible money laundering offences.

