SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS

The following pages feature a selection of seizures and prosecutions cases based on media and other reports published between April and mid-October 2019 that are considered significant in terms of species/volumes seized, modus operandi, penalties imposed, or to highlight enforcement action. Sources are cited at the end of each country/territory section and have not been checked for accuracy and authenticity. They are not intended to represent TRAFFIC’s policies, positions or opinions.

CITES Appendix-listings are placed in parentheses, where applicable.

BIG CATS

CAMEROON: On 26 May 2019, it was reported that a police officer responsible for the protection of wildlife in the hunting areas surrounding Bouba Ndjida National Park had been arrested in Odza, Yaoundé, after being found in possession of a Leopard Panthera pardus (CITES I) skin and five Lion P. leo (CITES II) skulls (and an elephant (CITES I) tusk). The officer allegedly transported the items to a hotel in Yaoundé with the aim of selling the products, but his activities were already under investigation by the park. He is alleged to have played a role in transporting illegal products and connecting buyers across the country, as well as acting as a group of poachers and offering them protection and business opportunities. Shortly before his arrest, he had reportedly sold two fresh cat Felidae skins.

Alwihda: https://bit.ly/36g6zFW, 26 May 2019

SOMALIA: On 20 July 2019, it was reported that authorities in Somaliland had seized 29 Cheetah Acinonyx jubatus (CITES I) cubs.

Research by the Cheetah Conservation Fund indicates an estimated 300 Cheetahs are poached and smuggled into the Arabian Peninsula each year, to be sold in the illegal pet trade where demand for the cubs as status symbols is thriving, particularly in the Gulf States. The animals are believed to originate in Ethiopia, northern Kenya, Somalia and Somaliland. Somaliland is reportedly the main transit route for Cheetahs trafficked out of East Africa (see also TRAFFIC Bulletin 30(2):72).

The rescued cubs are being kept in a safe place with a long-term aim of reintroducing the species/volumes seized, modus operandi, penalties imposed, or to highlight enforcement action. Sources are cited at the end of each country/territory section and have not been checked for accuracy and authenticity. They are not intended to represent TRAFFIC’s policies, positions or opinions.

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VIET NAM: On 26 July 2019, three Vietnamese nationals were detained in Cau Giay District for involvement in the illegal trade in seven frozen Tiger Panthera tigris (CITES I) carcasses from Lao PDR. The men were part of a gang that had reportedly been trafficking tiger carcasses from Lao PDR to Viet Nam over several years; the chief operator allegedly used his business as a cover and travelled to Lao PDR to buy and freeze the tiger carcasses before transporting them to Viet Nam.


BIRDS

HONG KONG SAR: On 30 July 2019, a man was sentenced at the District Court to 32 months’ imprisonment for smuggling into Hong Kong International Airport from Malaysia two air parcels containing 27 Helmeted Hornbill Rhinoplax vigil (CITES I) casques in January 2019.


INDONESIA: On 26 June 2019, authorities arrested two people who were selling birds and other wildlife in their shops in Telangkang Village Katingan Hilir District. Among the 119 birds confiscated was the Common Hill Myna Gracula religiosa, Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot Loriculus gilligu (both CITES II) and Greater Green Leafbird Chloropsis sonnerati. According to the perpetrators, they have been trading since 2013; the birds would usually be sent to Surabaya and Semarang in the Sampit City of East Kotawaringin Regency (Central Kalimantan) and Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan.

On 17 July 2019, officials at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport foiled an attempt to smuggle 72 Helmeted Hornbill Rhinoplax vigil (CITES I) casques that were bound for Hong Kong. One woman was arrested. The beaks had been wrapped in aluminium foil and placed under bread in a tin being carried in a tote bag.


PHILIPPINES: Jomar L. Toledo and Rompas M. Lumakore of General Santos City, arrested on 8 April 2019 for illegal trade in wildlife, including 345 birds (see TRAFFIC Bulletin 31(1):44), have each been fined P30,000 (US$580); the specimens, believed to be coming from Papua New Guinea, were being held in a warehouse in Masi City and the men were acting as caretakers. Species seized included Red-and-blue Lories Eos histrio and Palm Cockatoos Probosciger aterrimus (both CITES I).


ELEPHANTS

The African Elephant Loxodonta africana is listed in CITES Appendix I, except the populations of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, which are included in Appendix II; the Asian Elephant Elephas maximus is listed in Appendix I.

CHINA: On 28 May 2019, Changzhou Customs Anti-smuggling Branch of Nanjing Customs, Jiangsu province, broke up a gang that smuggled, processed and sold ivory; three suspects were arrested.

The investigation began in 2018, when Nanjing Customs received intelligence that criminal gangs were smuggling ivory by land to Changzhou for carving. They identified one person who reportedly had a close relationship with ivory smuggling gangs abroad.
as well as local ivory carvers and sellers. He and two others were arrested and 34 pieces of ivory and 39 ivory products were found on their premises; the total amount smuggled by the principal suspect is estimated at 563 kg. The provenance of the ivory is not reported. The head of the smuggling gang suspected of supplying the suspect has also been arrested and is being investigated separately.


GABON: On 30 September 2019, guards in Minkebé National Park in Woleu-Ntem seized 41 pairs of tusks (200 kg) and 37 elephant tails from Cameroonian poachers following an exchange of fire.


KENYA: On 10 June 2019, a Meru magistrate sentenced Francis Murithi to 10 years imprisonment, or a fine of KES3 million (USD28,500), for possession of an elephant tusk (6.5 kg) without a permit.

On 15 August 2019, at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JIA), Lazzibi Amal, a French national, was arrested in possession of an ivory bangle. She was subsequently fined KES1 million (USD9,500). The court allowed her to access the bank in the airport to withdraw the funds or surrender to the court, along with her passport.

In the same month it was reported that Spanish national Maria Pich-Aguilera, in transit from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, had been detained at JIA in possession of an ivory bangle and fined KES1 million.

On 20 August 2019, at a court in Kibera, four police officers were sentenced to life imprisonment, or ordered to pay a fine of KES20 million (USD190,000) each, after being found guilty of elephant poaching. Stephen Ngawai, Martin Mwiti, Francis Karanja and Peter Kura Kimungi were caught in Nairobi West in 2016 with a 5 kg elephant tusk.


LIBERIA: At Salaya Magisterial Court, John Z. David of Salaya District, Lofa County, was sentenced to one year in prison and fined USD2,500 after he pleaded guilty to killing more than six elephants.


MALAWI: On 20 June 2019, at Zomba Magistrates’ Court, Faness Dickson of Machinga was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment with hard labour for possession of two pieces of raw ivory (742 g) and three elephant leg bones without a permit. Dickson was apprehended at Nselena Trading Centre in January as he attempted to sell the pieces.

On 15 July 2019, in a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court overturned a MK2.5 million (USD3,300) fine imposed on two brothers for their role in the trafficking of 2.6 t of ivory and sentenced each to prison for eight years. Patrick and Chancy Kaunda were apprehended in 2013 when their vehicle was intercepted in Rumpi, en route to Lilongwe from Tanzania; inside were 781 pieces of raw ivory tusks concealed amongst bags of cement, representing the death of almost 400 elephants.

On 3 October 2019, it was reported that Nickson Nshuluka Banda and Assani Phiri had been sentenced to imprisonment at Kasungu Senior Resident Magistrates’ Court for six-and-a-half years and four years, respectively, after being found guilty of killing an elephant in Kasungu National Park in July 2019. The duo was convicted on three game offences which included entering a protected area, conveying weapons into a protected area, killing a wild animal from a protected area, illegal possession of a specimen of a listed species, and possessing a firearm and ammunition without a permit.


SINGAPORE: see Other/multi-seizures.

PALM COCKATOO ►
Probosciger aterrimus (CITES I) was among over 300 birds seized from a warehouse in the Philippines in April 2019 and in a separate consignment of birds seized in Indonesia in March.

ZIMBABWE: On 21 June 2019, at Matabeleland North Provincial Magistrates’ Court, Hwange, six poachers charged with illegal possession of ivory were each sentenced to nine years in prison.

In November 2018, the authorities received information that the men were in possession of ivory at Dete, which they intended to sell. Officers pretending to be trophy dealers intercepted the group and seized two pieces of ivory (37 kg).

On 18 July 2016, at Hwange Magistrates’ Court, Alois Savanhu was sentenced to nine years in prison after being found in the illegal possession of almost 77 kg of raw ivory. Three others jointly charged were acquitted.

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**SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS**

**MARINE**

**BELGIUM:** On 30 May 2019, it was reported that officers at Zaventem Airport had seized 24 bags containing 1.2 t of shark fins and ray wings which were being transported on a flight from Liberia to Hong Kong, labelled as dried fish and fish entrails. Among the consignment were wings of guitarfish Glauacogus spp. and fins of hammerhead sharks Sphyrna spp. The shipment reportedly derived from some 1,600 to 2,000 animals, most of them young. Guitarfish were listed in CITES Appendix II in 2013.

**CHINA:** In early April 2019, Qingdao Customs officials in Qingdao port, Shandong province, alleged that a horse trading company was involved in illegal wildlife shipments, seized a container arriving from Peru, declared as horse hides. Following X-ray inspection, the consignment was found to contain 560 kg of dried seahorses Hippocampus spp. (CITES II) concealed within layers of horse hides. A number of suspects were arrested and subsequent inspection of a warehouse yielded a further 200 kg of dried seahorses.

**Ghana:** On 20 May 2019, a vehicle leaving a warehouse in the coastal city of Accra; the vessel had been monitored by the authorities for several days. Three Peruvian nationals and a Venezuelan national were arrested. Fishing, transportation and trade in seahorses has been prohibited in Peru since August 2004.

**South Africa:** A selection of incidents involving abalone (perlemoen) Hoilitis midas.

**On 3 May 2019,** a man was arrested in Table View, Cape Town, after being found in possession of 13,042 dried and shucked abalones in his vehicle.

**On 8 May 2019,** a vehicle leaving a warehouse in Cape Town was searched by authorities and found to contain boxes of dried abalones (348 kg). A subsequent search of the warehouse uncovered an illegal abalone processing facility. A Chinese national was arrested.

**On 16 July 2019,** authorities in Milnerton, Cape Town, uncovered an illegal abalone processing facility and vehicles containing boxes of abalones. A second premises in the area uncovered further quantities, yielding a total of 19,032 dried abalones and 5,064 wet abalones. Four suspects were arrested. The raid is deemed to be a significant blow to the illegal abalone trade in this province.

**On 6 August 2019,** authorities in the Western Cape arrested two foreign nationals after an abalone processing facility was discovered in premises in Protea Park, Hermanus. A total of 1,170 kg of wet and dried abalones was seized.

**On 5 September 2019,** police at Lingoteleu West Police station, Western Cape, arrested an employee of the South African National Parks (SANParks) in possession of 936 abalones at premises in Velani Crescent in C-Section, Khayelitsha.

**On 10 September 2019,** 5,000 dried abalones were seized from premises in Loarti Village, Kraaifontein. No arrests were made and the case is under investigation.

**On 12 September 2019,** three Western Cape police officers who are part of the Major Offences Reaction Team were arrested for armed robbery. The charges relate to an incident on 21 July when the driver of a taxi transporting poached abalones from Hermanus to Cape Town was pulled over by the officers in Somerset West; one of the officers drove the taxi to his residence, where the abalones were allegedly offloaded. The driver was dropped off and instructed to return to his vehicle which was found without the abalones. An investigation led to the arrest of the suspects.

**On 3 October 2019,** authorities acting on information intercepted a vehicle in the Table View area and seized bags containing shucked abalones (1,973). A suspect was arrested.


**Spain:** On 31 May 2019, at Madrid Criminal Court, a criminal network accused of removing 724 kg of juvenile European Eels Anguilla anguilla (CITES II) from Spain in 500 suitcases between 2011 and 2012 was fined EUR380,000 (USD63,700). The eels were exported using falsified permits that declared the shipment contained the unprotected American Eel Anguilla rostrata.


**Pangolins**

All eight species of pangolins Manis spp. are listed in CITES Appendix I.

**Cameroon:** On 31 May 2019, it was reported that four people had been arrested in Tonga, Ndé department, after attempting to smuggle nearly 100 kg of pangolin scales into a hotel. The two women and two men allegedly bought the scales from wild meat sellers and other dealers in Tonga and Makenéné.

In a separate case, in Douala arrested two people carrying five bags of pangolin scales (200 kg) from a transportation agency.

**Africa Feeds:** https://bit.ly/2PnA47Q, 10 October 2019

**Belgium:** On 30 May 2019, it was reported that officers at Zaventem Airport had seized 24 bags containing 1.2 t of shark fins and ray wings which were being transported on a flight from Liberia to Hong Kong, labelled as dried fish and fish entrails. Among the consignment were wings of guitarfish Glauacogus spp. and fins of hammerhead sharks Sphyrnidae spp. The shipment reportedly derived from some 1,600 to 2,000 animals, most of them young. Guitarfish were listed in CITES Appendix II in 2013.

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**SEIZURES AND PROSECUTIONS**

**CONGO, DEM. REP.:** On 12 August 2019, authorities seized 383 kg of Giant Ground Pangolin Manis gigantea scales in Bamenda, North-West region. No further details reported.

**CÔTE D’IVOIRE:** On 23 July 2019, authorities seized three tonnes of pangolin scales, reportedly the largest consignment of pangolin scales ever recorded in the country. No further details reported.

**HONG KONG SAR:** On 17 July 2019, Customs officials at Hong Kong International Airport detained two male passengers arriving, respectively, from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Xiamen, Fujian Province, China, after a total of 100 kg of suspected pangolin Manis spp. scales were found in their suitcases.

**MALAWI:** In September 2019, at a court in Lilongwe, Jimmy Mkwelazemba and Julius Sanudzi of Malawi were sentenced to three years in prison for smuggling and the illegal possession of pangolins following their arrest in May 2019. Both men are thought to be part of one of Africa’s largest transnational wildlife trafficking syndicates.

**NIGERIA:** On 17 July 2019, it was reported that Customs officials had seized some 670 kg of pangolin scales from a warehouse in Lagos. No details on provenance or of any ensuing arrests were reported.

**SINGAPORE:** See Other/multi-seizures.

**SOUTH AFRICA:** On 14 June 2019, it was reported that Shadrack Malatzi, Israel Mameja and France Shai had each been sentenced at Lenyenye Regional Court, Limpopo, to an effective five years in prison for possession of a live pangolin. The animal, which was seized from a vehicle, was returned to the wild.

**THAILAND:** On 12 August 2019, authorities seized 383 kg of Giant Ground Pangolin Manis gigantea scales. No further details reported.

**USA:** On 22 May 2019, it was reported that Li Wan of Vancouver had been fined CAD18,000 (USD13,700) after pleading guilty to attempting to smuggle 19 live turtles Testudines into the country from the USA in a duffel bag. The money from the fine will go into the federal government’s environmental damages fund. Li was caught with the undeclared turtles in his vehicle at Point Roberts border crossing on 27 January.

**VIET NAM:** In May 2019, authorities announced a seizure of 8.3 t of pangolin scales from “an African country” in the northern Haiphong port. In total, officials discovered 311 bags hidden beneath sacks of Cassia Senna siamea seeds; each bag of scales weighed between 25 kg to 30 kg.

**ZIMBABWE:** On 21 August 2019, it was reported that Matabeleland North Provincial Magistrates’ Court, Hwange, had sentenced Killion Siacho of Lusulu, Binga, to a total of 24 years’ imprisonment: 15 years for illegal possession of 175 pangolin scales (2,525 kg) and nine years for possession of a firearm.

**REPTILES**

**AUSTRALIA:** On 5 June 2019, authorities at Perth Airport arrested two Japanese nationals attempting to smuggle 13 bobtail lizards Tiliqua spp. out of the country. The men were about to board separate flights to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur; one of them was found to have 13 native bobtail lizards in his check-in luggage. The lizards, packed in net bags wrapped in towels and placed in plastic containers, appeared to be in poor health and were without food or water. Similar containers were found inside the suitcase of the other suspect and photos of the lizards discovered on his phone. The two were subsequently investigated for possible involvement in an international wildlife smuggling syndicate linked to three other Japanese nationals charged with similar offences in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth over the previous six months.

**TURKEY:** On 29 July 2019, it was announced that security forces at Istanbul Airport had seized over 1.2 t of pangolin scales after becoming suspicious of a shipment declared as “simply prepared (animal) bones or horn cores.” Authorities were initially alerted by Customs to a possible health and safety hazard before the contents were found to consist of pangolin scales. No further details reported.

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The animals were reportedly ordered online from different locations and picked up by Li at a US mailing outlet, and included CITES-listed species: Black Pond Turtle Geoclemys hamiltonii (CITES I); Diamondback Terrapin Malaclemys terrapin (CITES II); Pig-nosed Turtle Carettochelys insculpta (CITES II); and CITES III-listed Pearl River Map Turtle Graptemys pseudogeographica and Black-knobbed Map Turtle G. nigrina.


**MALAGASY:** On 22 May 2019, it was reported that an appeals court in Tulear had upheld a six-year sentence against three people convicted of dealing in over 10,000 Radiated Tortoises Geochelone radiata (CITES I). The court also fined the defendants MGA100 million (USD26,500) and ordered them to pay MGA100 million to the environment ministry. The men were arrested at a house in possession of the turtles in April 2018.

**AFP:** [https://lyoho.it/2Wzu5Sa](https://lyoho.it/2Wzu5Sa), 22 May 2019
MALAYSIA: On 18 May 2019, Sabah Wildlife Department seized 220 crocodiles Crocodylia spp. at a swamp in Kampung Pasir Putih, Tawau, believed to have been smuggled in from neighbouring Kalimantan. This was reported to be the first time that the authorities had uncovered crocodile smuggling from outside the State; the provenance (and intended purpose) of the animals was being investigated, including whether they were to supply local crocodile farms. Five had perished; the surviving specimens were released in the wild and two Malaysians and two Indonesians were arrested.

Under Schedule 2 of the Sabah Wildlife Conservation Enactment, it is illegal to hunt, collect the eggs or remove the crocodiles from the wild under any circumstances.


ZIMBABWE: On 2 August 2019, at Harare provincial magistrates' court, Blessed Morris of Beatrice was sentenced to the mandatory minimum nine years' imprisonment for possession of protected wildlife without the requisite permits. He was apprehended on 28 July while walking in Mbare in possession of a woman's handbag, prompting the police to investigate. Inside the bag, wrapped in cloth, were specimens later identified as a Yellow-throated Plated Lizard Gerrhosaurus flavigularis, a Mozambican Spitting Cobra Naja mossambicus, two Olive Grass Snakes Psammophis mosebach, and a python Pythonidae, all protected species.

ZmLive: https://bit.ly/2INeDi, 2 August 2019

RHINOCEROSSES

All species of Rhinocerotidae are listed in CITES Appendix I except the South African and Swaziland populations of Ceratotherium simum, which are listed in Appendix II.

CHINA: On 16 August 2019 it was reported that Beijing Second Intermediate People's Court had rejected an appeal by four people sentenced to prison for up to 13 years for trading in 33 kg of African rhino horn.

Defendants Hou and Xin bought the horn through the online platform Wechat, which they sold to co-defendants Lin and Chen. On 26 April 2018, police arrested Hou, Lin and Chen in a vehicle and seized 19 pieces of rhino horns. Xin was arrested at a hotel in Huaire, Beijing.

The four had been sentenced in Xicheng District Court: Lin to 13 years and six months in prison, and fined CNY26,000; Hou to 13 years, fined CNY26,000; Chen to 13 years in prison, fined CNY2,400, and Xin was sentenced to nine years in prison and fined CNY18,000.

Weixin: https://bit.ly/2JwLaAa, 16 August 2019

MOZAMBIQUE: On 26 August 2019, at Maputo City Court, Chinese national Pu Chunjing was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment following his arrest at Maputo International Airport on 15 April 2018 with 4.2 kg of rhino horn pieces in a suitcase. Pu, who had been bound for Hong Kong via Doha, was also fined an undisclosed amount.

This is reportedly the first case of a foreign national imprisoned in Mozambique for a wildlife crime. The provenance of the horns has not been established.

On 2 September 2019, it was reported that two poachers had been given prison sentences of 17 and 16 years, respectively, for killing two rhinos in Kruger National Park, South Africa, and for an unlawful possession of licensed weapons. The duo, from Gaza Province, also received fines. It is reported to be the first conviction and sentencing in Mozambique for rhino poaching since 2008.


USA: During 12–16 August 2019, at Skukuza Regional Court, three people received prison sentences for rhino poaching in Kruger National Park. Adolph Ndlovu, convicted of trespassing, being in possession of an unlicensed firearm, unlicensed ammunition, and possession of a firearm with intent to commit a crime, was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment. Abedrindu Mahlabane, arrested in 2017, was convicted of trespassing, being an illegal immigrant, possession of and pointing an unlicensed firearm, and given an effective sentence of 10 years in prison. Jeffrey Mathebula, arrested in 2015, was fined R10,000 (USD678) or sentenced to two years’ imprisonment of which half is suspended for five years.


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USA: On 1 October 2019, Richard Sheridan, an Irish national, pleaded guilty to trafficking a “libation cup” carved from the horn of a Black Rhinoceros Diceros bicornis and was sentenced to 14 months in prison, with two years of supervised release.

Sheridan was extradited to the USA in August following his indictment in May charging him and an accomplice, Irish national Michael Hegarty, with “conspiracy to traffic in a libation cup made from the horn of protected rhinoceros”. Sheridan was also charged with smuggling the cup out of the USA. He was arrested in the UK as part of an ongoing criminal investigation.

Sheridan and Hegarty were alleged to be members of an organised crime gang accused of carrying out raids on museums and auction houses to steal rhino horn and high-value artefacts from UK museums and from European countries, Hong Kong SAR and the USA. Both have previously served prison sentences in connection with related offences (see TRAFFIC Bulletin 28(1):33; 30(1):32).

VIET NAM: On 16 May 2019, in a Lao Cai courtroom, three men received prison sentences for attempting to smuggle rhino horn across the border into China. The sentences were prosecuted under the country’s recently amended penal code, which includes a provision for higher penalties for those convicted of wildlife crime.

Two of the men, Duong Van Thanh and Duong Van Sang, were arrested in May 2018 in Lao Cai after police received information that they would be transporting the horn over the border. They were caught in a car with 20 kg of rhino horn concealed in vases and a nylon bag. Police later arrested the owner of the rhino horn, Duong Van Chiem.

Duong Van Thanh and Duong Van Sang were each imprisoned for 8.5 years, while Duong Van Chiem received a 10-year sentence.

On 25 July 2019, authorities at Hanoi’s Noi Bai International Airport seized 55 pieces (125 kg) of rhino horn that had been encased in plaster. The provenance of the horn, which was bound for the United Arab Emirates, was not known.


ZIMBABWE: A man serving 10 years in jail for poaching a rhino in Beitbridge has been jailed for a further nine years for poaching another rhino at a safari lodge in Chipping. Godknows Mashame was found guilty at Chippinge Magistrates’ Court after a witness provided evidence against him. He will finish serving one sentence before serving the second term.

It is alleged that Mashame entered the safari lodge area in July 2011 without a permit and poached a Black Rhinoceros Diceros bicornis and poached a Black Rhinoceros safari lodge area in July 2011 without a permit.

The accused, who did not attend the hearing, have appealed their sentences.

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Several major operators involved in the syndicate, one of whom owned a wood processing factory in Ruili, on the border with Myanmar, were arrested and await trial.


INDIA: On 10 September 2019, authorities in Mumbai disrupted an international smuggling racket and arrested three people in possession of 1,556 kg of Red Sandalwood (Red Sanders) Pterocarpus santalinus (CITES II). The consignment had been transported from Chennai and was bound for Hong Kong via contacts in Goa.

On 27 September 2019, at Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi, authorities arrested three people for illegal possession and an attempt to smuggle to Hong Kong 160 kg of Red Sandalwood. Bundles of sandalwood were detected in the luggage of one suspect; he was allowed to check in while being kept under surveillance, during which time it was evident that two other passengers were accompanying him; all three were apprehended. Others are believed to be involved and the case is under investigation.

During two separate incidents at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai, on 4 October 2018, officials seized a total of 87 kg of Red Sandalwood chips from two Sudanese nationals. The first man, flying to Addis Ababa, was carrying 75 kg of the wood in his carry-on luggage (9 kg) and checked-in baggage (66 kg); the second case involved 10 kg of sandalwood chips in plastic packets in the possession of a passenger bound for Doha, Qatar.

Over 60,000 specimens of Conophytums Conophytum spp. were among two separate seizures of succulents illegally collected in the Western Cape, South Africa, in recent months. These plants form clusters and grow largely on inhospitable rocky slabs, sheltering from the sun in cracks and crevices. The clusters are not large and it is easy to destroy entire populations at a local level.

F L O R A

CHINA: In July 2019, a raid involving 100 wildlife law enforcement officers resulted in the seizure of many tonnes of teak Tectona spp. and rosewood Dalbergia (CITES II) logs and the dismantling of a major crime syndicate involved in the smuggling of timber from Myanmar to Yunnan Province. The timber was seized from eight warehouses around Nongdao. Anticipating resistance from workers and villagers employed by the timber smuggling syndicates, helicopters were used for initial surveillance and power was cut to the town to disable CCTV cameras and prevent news of the raid spreading.

Several major operators involved in the syndicate, one of whom owned a wood processing factory in Ruili, on the border with Myanmar, were arrested and await trial.

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PERU: On 8 August 2019, at Second Unipersonal Penal Court of Maynas, Rubén Antonio Espinoza, director of Cacao del Perú Norte SAC, a company charged with the illegal trade in timber and obstruction, was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment; Ernesto Vega Delgado and Giovanny Cuba Ramirez of the same company, were given a four-year suspended sentence for related offences.

The three are linked to a Czech-American businessman, who since 2010 established a network of companies for the large-scale cultivation of oil palm and cocoa in the country. Cacao del Perú Norte SAC (now called Tamshi SAC), was one of these companies, accused of deforesting more than 13,000 ha of forests in Loreto and Ucayali, in the Peruvian Amazon, and for the illegal trade in timber forest products. The company prevented inspections of the deforested areas leading to a charge of obstruction.

On 2 September 2019 the company was also ordered to pay the State the equivalent of USD4,626,750 within the first year of the sentence as compensation for the transformation of 1,950 ha of forest in Tamshiyacu, in the district of Fernando Lores, in Loreto. Images and testimony presented during the trial showed what the area had looked like before the arrival of the company and the subsequent extent of deforestation; it was also able to prove that the wood had been extracted and later processed and illegally traded commercially without a permit.

The accused, who did not attend the hearing, have appealed their sentences.


SOUTH AFRICA: On 12 September 2019, at Cape Town Regional Court, Czech nationals Jaromir Chvastek and Tomas Malir were sentenced to prison for two years, suspended for five years, and each fined ZAR500,000 (USD33,500).

The duo was apprehended in Rietpoort, Western Cape, on 7 August 2019 after more than 1,000 plants were found in their possession. The specimens had been collected near Bitterfontein, including several “critically rare” plants and more than 900 vulnerable or protected plants, predominantly Conophytum and Adromischus spp., as well as some aloe spp. (CITES II) and Haworthia spp. Also in their possession were collection bags and GPS co-ordinates to pinpoint the location of these commercially valuable plants. It is reported that Chvastek operated a website in the Czech Republic in which a wide variety of succulent plants, including South African species, were offered for sale. The men were ordered to be deported once the case was completed.

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On 8 October 2019, two suspects were arrested in a vehicle travelling between Ashton and Robertson, Western Cape, while transporting 60,397 Conophytum succulents.


USA: A three-year investigation has concluded with the imprisonment of William Starr Schwartz after he was found guilty of stealing more than 500 federally protected cactus plants from Lake Mead National Recreation Area (Arizona/Nevada). Schwartz, who has been ordered to serve 24 months in prison, will then serve three years of supervised release, during which time he is barred from entering the park and surrounding public land. He must also pay USD22,655 in restitution.

Court documents detail how Schwartz stole and directed others to steal the plants for him between October 2014 and August 2018. He sold the cacti via the internet, illegally shipping specimens to more than 20 countries. Numerous cacti plants obtained illegally were recovered during a search of Schwartz’s residence in August 2018.


OTHER/MULTI-SEIZURES

CHINA: On 16 May 2019, Gongbei Customs officials in Zhuhai city, Guangdong province, seized 1.6 t of ivory, later identified as teeth of Hippopotamus amphibius (CITES II) and related products during inspection of a craft manufacturing company. The company allegedly imported the items from overseas and hired workers to process and sell them illegally.


CONGO: On 13 May 2019, Congo nationals Armand T onton Ibanda and Justin Wawa were arrested in possession of a bag holding 260 ivory (CITES I) chopsticks, 100 ivory bracelets, necklaces and rings, 100 ivory pendants, seven ivory statuettes, two ivory pieces, as well as skins of 15 protected species (felines, mammals, antelopes, crocodiles, pythons). Reportedly, they had been supplying traffickers in Senegal, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire since the 1980s. They await trial.


INDONESIA: On 19 September 2019, four people were each sentenced to four years in prison and fined IDR50 million (USD3,500). They were found guilty of attempting to smuggle by boat to Malaysia via Rupat Island, in March, 40 protected animals, including 38 birds (including Palm Cockatoo Probosciger aterrimus, Helmeted Hornbill Rhinoplax vigil (both CITES I)) and Macgrogg’s Honeyeater Macgregoria pulchra (CITES II), and two Agile Gibbons Hylobates agilis (CITES I), before being foiled by the authorities.


MALAYSIA: On 15 May 2019, at Kuala Terengganu Sessions Court, Vietnamese nationals Hoang Van Viet and Nguyen Van Thiet were convicted of the illegal possession of threatened wildlife and each sentenced to two years in prison and fined MYR1.56 million (USD390,000). The duo was caught in April 2019 in Hulu Sungai Tersat in Taman Negara Pahang National Park, with 22 snakes and 138 parts of the following CITES I-listed species: Leopard Panthera pardus, Serow Capricornis sumatrensis, Tapir Tapiro indicus, Sun Bear Helarctos malayanus, and Golden Cat Catopuma temmincki. It is the first time in Malaysia’s history a fine of more than MYR1 million has been imposed for wildlife crime. The duo face a further 16 years in prison if they fail to pay the fines.

On 5 October 2019, almost 800 animal parts were seized during a raid on premises in Kapit, Sarawak, Borneo, including casques of 148 hornbills Bucerotidae, hornbill feathers, pangolin Manis spp. scales, porcupine quills, bear (CITES III) bile and deer antlers. One man was arrested.


PHILIPPINES: On 30 May 2019, Ninoy Aquino International Airport officials, at the Central Mail Exchange Center in Pasay City, intercepted six packages of wildlife, two of which contained 100 live tarantulas Theraphosidae in plastic containers declared as “mails and toys”; they had arrived from Malaysia and Poland and were addressed to residents of Sto Tomas, Batangas, Naga City, and Cebu. Stingray Myliobatoidei skins (71) were also found in a package from Jakarta, Indonesia.


SINGAPORE: On 21 September 2019, authorities seized three containers declared to contain timber arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in transit for Viet Nam. One was found to contain 8.8 t of ivory from African Elephants Loxodonta africana (CITES I), Singapore’s largest seizure of ivory to date, and 11.9 t of pangolin scales contained in 237 sacks, later identified as being from Giant Ground Pangolins Manis gigantea (CITES I).

This case brings the volume of pangolin scales reportedly seized in Singapore since April 2019 to 37.5 t. The items were to be destroyed to prevent them entering the market. The seizure was made possible following information shared by the General Administration of Customs of the People’s Republic of China.


VIET NAM: On 12 April 2019, authorities at Nam Hai Dinh Vu Port, Hai Phong, discovered a shipment transporting 3.5 t of ivory and 4 t of pangolin Manis spp. scales, (both CITES I), concealed in containers of asphalt.


ZIMBABWE: On 27 April 2019, it was reported that Never Ndiruvu of Dete, had been sentenced at Hwange Provincial Magistrates’ Court to 27 years’ imprisonment. He was convicted of the unlawful possession of Lion Panthera leo (CITES II) skin, a python Pythonidae and raw ivory (CITES I). He claimed to have picked up the items while herding cattle in Hwange National Park, intending to use them for medicinal purposes.

Newsday:https://bit.ly/31XmXbc, 27 April 2019