



**HUMANE SOCIETY
INTERNATIONAL**

Rhinoceros horn stockpiles – a serious threat to rhinos

Globally, rhino horn stockpiles originate from a number of sources: natural mortality, seizures by field staff, police or Customs, de-horning exercises and hunting. They are held by both national and local governments, hunters, vets, museums and research institutions. In addition, pre-Convention rhino horns are often held by private individuals. Many of the rhino horns in museums in Europe, including some that have been the subject of recent thefts, date back to the nineteenth century.

Since April 2008, a minimum of 41 rhinoceros horns have been stolen from private premises in South Africa, Europe and the United States. Most of these horns were held by museums. As the price of rhino horn has escalated, the illegal trade in rhino horn has expanded beyond range and consumer States and is now affecting States that are not traditionally associated with crimes relating to rhino horn.

The year 2011, in particular, has seen a large number of thefts from museum displays in Europe. Europol has stated that it has uncovered a European organised crime syndicate behind many of these thefts.

Rhino horn stockpiles in Africa grew from 15,000 kg in 2002¹ to 19,850 kg in 2006 and 21,078 kg in 2008, and are now estimated to amount to 23,545 kg in nine rhino range States². A further 5,219 kg of rhino horns are reportedly held by five other CITES Parties³, but there are no accurate figures on stocks of rhino horn in Europe. The market value of rhino horn has been estimated by Europol to be worth between USD 35,500 and USD 280,000⁴. HSI's research in Vietnam revealed a range of pharmacy prices of USD36,000 – 83,600 per kg for cut pieces of rhino horn and USD 19,000 – 30,000 per kg for powdered horn.

South Africa

A sizeable quantity of rhino horn is held by private individuals in South Africa, where 24.9% of rhinos are privately owned⁵. It has been estimated that at least 2,150 kg of horn has accumulated over the last four years, and possibly as much as 3,834.50 kg of rhino horn is now in private hands in South Africa. Another estimate suggests that as much as 4,750 kg of rhino horn is held by private owners⁶. South Africa's declaration of privately-owned rhino horn stocks to CITES in mid-2009 falls short of these figures by as much as 70%, partly because five Provinces in South Africa did not declare their rhino horn stocks⁷.

There have been a number of recently-reported thefts of rhino horn in South Africa. In September 2010 it was reported that three employees of the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks agency had planned to steal the agency's rhino horn stockpile. After a tip-off, the cache of rhino horn and ivory was moved to a more secure location⁸.

Mpumalanga was one of the five Provinces that did not declare its rhino horn stocks in 2009⁹.

¹ Rhino Horn Stockpile Management, S. Milledge. TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa 2002

² CoP15 Doc. 45.1 Annex

³ ibid

⁴ London's museums warned of rhino horn theft risk. BBC News, 25th July 2011

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-14278681>

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

⁷ ibid

⁸ Top parks official accused of poaching. Mail and Guardian, South Africa. September 10 2010. <http://mg.co.za/article/2010-09-10-top-parks-official-accused-of-poaching>

⁹ CoP15 Doc. 45.1, Annex

It has been reported that over 200 horns were illegally sold from private stocks between January 2006 and September 2009. A further 6 were stolen from stockpiles resulting from natural mortalities, 16 from other government stockpiles and 55 from other sources¹⁰

In October 2010, an armed gang broke into a safari lodge in South Africa, where they stole seven rhino horns. The residents, a game capturer and a vet, who were keeping the horns in a safe, had been issued permits for the horns by the provincial Department of Environmental Affairs¹¹.

Rhino horn hunting trophies from South Africa have entered illegal trade. An ongoing court case in South Africa has highlighted the case of a rhino farmer and hunter who bought 36 rhinos from government-owned stocks and on whose premises the carcasses of 20 rhinos were found buried. As the value of rhino horn has risen to well above the cost of a rhino hunt, there is a strong risk that hunters may find it worthwhile to sell their trophies illegally.

On 11th May 2011, German police arrested two British men, aged 18 and 35, after reports that they had approached a German hunter and asked him to sell them a rhino horn for €25,000. The hunter called the Hamburg police, who arrested the two men at a highway resting area, but the men were later released¹².

On 26th June 2011, the European Taxidermy Federation warned its members that taxidermists in Denmark and Sweden had recently been approached by people wanting to acquire rhino horn for castles or museums. These people were described as having no interest in CITES permits. The buyers said that they were from Ireland or Britain and claimed to be buying for friends or customers who wished to source African trophies for their castles¹³.

Given the escalating price of rhino horn in the markets of east Asia, the risk of rhino horn stocks entering illegal trade must surely be higher than it has ever been. The existence of large quantities of rhino horn, particularly in private hands, poses a serious threat to rhino populations, since they are difficult to monitor and their potential entry onto the illegal market will only stimulate demand further.

Recommendations

- Rhino horn stocks held by private individuals, enforcement agencies and provincial and central governments should be declared, thoroughly inventoried in terms of their provenance, consolidated by the central government and, preferably, destroyed.
- If stocks are not destroyed, they should be identified, marked, registered and secured in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP15). They should be placed in a central location and adequate security should be provided.
- Private rhino owners should be compelled to register all rhinos bought, sold and re-located, along with all births and deaths (from all causes). All rhino horns from these mortalities, apart from hunting trophies, should be surrendered to the central government.
- Hunting trophies should also be declared, identified, marked, registered and secured in such a way that the authorities can make spot checks in order to ensure that they do not enter the illegal trade.

Antique rhino horn trade

In 2010, six UK auction houses sold antique rhino horns for an accumulated value of USD 2,180,000¹⁴. Some of the items sold were simply horns mounted on plaques. In many cases, there was a significant discrepancy between the advertised guide price and the price eventually realised at auction. In one case, a rhino horn mounted on a shield that was expected to reach £20-30,000 was sold for £60,000. A carved 17th century libation cup, expected to reach £30-50,000 sold for £280,000¹⁵.

¹⁰ CoP15 Doc. 45.1, Annex

¹¹ Rhino horn theft linked to government. Times Live, 27th October 2010

<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article730837.ece/Rhino-horn-theft-linked-to-government>

¹² Kauf eines nashorn-horns angeboten/festnahmen durch mek Hamburg. Sek Einsatz, 16th May 2011. <http://sek-einsatz.de/nachrichten-sek-einsaetze/kauf-eines-nashorn-horns-angeboten-festnahmen-durch-mek-hamburg/3676>

¹³ European Taxidermy Federation. Rhino Horn. 26/06/2011. www.eurotaxidermy.eu/aktuelles/rhino_horn

¹⁴ DEFRA, pers.comm.

¹⁵ DEFRA pers.comm

For many years UK and EU regulations have defined mounted rhino horns in their natural state as “worked” items that could be legally exported. Indeed, a UK ruling made in 2009 allowed antique rhino horn trophies to be deemed “works of art”¹⁶.

However, in 2010 it became clear that the steep rise in prices, along with the fact that many of these items were bought by bidders from east Asia, was a sign that at least some of them were destined for the medicinals trade.

In September 2010, the UK announced new stricter domestic measures relating to the re-export of antique rhino horn¹⁷. A month later, Germany followed suit. Following reports that other EU member States had received applications for re-export or requests for information on how such applications would be handled, the EU enacted similar regulations in February 2011.

Under the new regulations, permits for the re-export of antique rhino horns must meet one of the following criteria¹⁸:

- The individual item is of such artistic value that it exceeds its potential value on the illegal medicine market;
- The item is part of a genuine exchange of cultural goods between reputable institutions (i. e. museums);
- The item has not been sold and is an heirloom moving as part of a family relocation or as part of a bequest;
- The item is part of a *bona fide* scientific research project.

While the export of rhino horns potentially destined for east Asia is the main target of the new regulations, there is also the potential for domestic medicinal trade, particularly in those Parties of the European, North American and Oceania regions that are home to large east Asian communities. There is also the potential for a lengthy chain of domestic sales of a single horn. The more frequently a horn changes hands, the more frequent the opportunities for illegal export.

The “artistic value” of an antique rhino horn cannot be objectively established. The value of an intricately carved libation cup of the type sold at auction, as with all auctioned items, is determined by the price that a bidder is prepared to pay for it. Furthermore, the price of rhino horn in the medicinals market is also subject to sudden change.

Some Parties report their trade data to CITES based only on permits used, rather than on permits issued, although records on permits issued may be kept domestically. This presents a potentially serious loophole. Travellers with permits to take antique rhino horn out of the country may not get their permits stamped as they leave. These permits can then be retained and re-used until the expiry of the permit. This could allow the subsequent export of non-permitted horns.

Recommendations

- There should be no legal domestic trade in rhino horns, regardless of their age or provenance, unless they are for bona fide scientific research purposes.
- The UK has indicated that the current exemption relating to the “artistic value” of rhino horns for sale at auction is subject to constant review. All Parties that allow such re-exports should ensure that any exemptions are as watertight as possible.
- All permits issued for the re-export of rhino horns should specify a very narrow date range for the export to occur and a meeting with Customs officials should be organised, so that the items can be inspected and the permits stamped. Failing this, permits should contain sufficient detail (measurements, exact weight etc), or the horns themselves should be microchipped, to make re-use impossible.
- Parties should report their trade data based on both permits issued and permits used. This will allow CITES to gather accurate information on the true volume of re-exports. This may require an amendment to the Secretariat’s *Guidelines for the preparation and submission of CITES annual reports* (Notification 2010/013 Annex). Specifically, since Section 3(b) of the Guidelines refer to special provisions for certain species, a section on rhino horn could be added there.

¹⁶ <http://www.antiquetrade gazette.com/news/7822.aspx>

¹⁷ SC61 Doc. 45.2

¹⁸ *ibid*

Museums and other institutions

The recent spate of rhino horn thefts, from museums in particular, represents a change in the pattern of the illegal rhino horn trade. Almost certainly this is being driven by the very high price of rhino horn on international markets. Thefts have occurred in Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, South Africa, Sweden, the UK and the USA.

Museum and auction house thefts since 2008

April 2008, South Africa - 120-year-old white rhino horn stolen¹⁹.

April 2008, South Africa - unknown number of rhino horns stolen from Grahamstown Observatory Museum and Oudtshoorn Museum²⁰.

April 2009, South Africa - two 19th century white rhino horns stolen from Cape Town's national Iziko Museum²¹.

October 2009, USA - rhino skull stolen from cheque-cashing business. Lower jaw found a day later: horns not found²².

December 11th 2009, UK - auctioneer in pleaded guilty to stealing a rhino horn from a client²³.

December 31st 2010, Germany - rhino horn stolen from Allwetterzoo Muenster Zoo, Germany²⁴.

February 21st 2011, UK - mounted head of black rhinos stolen from Auctioneer²⁵.

March 5th 2011, France - 19th century rhino horn stolen Museum of Natural History in Rouen²⁶.

April 19th 2011, Portugal - two 18th century rhino horns taken from a university Science Museum. A spokesperson linked this incident to similar crimes in Europe and South Africa²⁷.

May 27th 2011, UK - rhino head stolen the Haslemere Educational Museum²⁸.

June 2011, Belgium – thieves attempted to steal rhino head from Liège Natural History Museum. The Polish thieves escaped in a vehicle with Dutch registration plates. They were later caught by police²⁹.

June 2011, Germany - entire upper jaw of a rhino, with two horns attached, taken from Hamburg Zoological Museum. Four further horns also taken. The thieves escaped³⁰.

June 4th 2011, Germany - staff at Museum of Natural Sciences realised that a horn in their white rhino exhibit had disappeared. The thieves were not caught³¹.

¹⁹ Precious ivory, horn moved to Kruger Park. Weekend Post, South Africa. 29 June, 2009.

<http://www.weekendpost.co.za/article.aspx?id=438981>

²⁰ ibid

²¹ ibid

²² Stolen Rhino Bottom Jaw Found; Horns Still a Dilemma. International Rhino Foundation, 17th October 2009.

www.rhinos-irf.org/en/art/765/

²³ Cirencester auctioneer Chris Surfleet escapes jail sentence after admitting rhino horn theft

Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard, 11th December 2009

www.wiltsglosstandard.co.uk/news/4790435.Auctioneer_escapes_jail_sentence_after_admitting_rhino_horn_theft/

²⁴ Aus dem Schaukasten gewildert: Eine gut organisierte Bande klaut in großem Stil Nashorn-Hörner aus deutschen Museen.

Die Branche ist entsetzt. Zeit online, undated. <http://www.zeit.de/2011/25/N-Nashoerner>

²⁵ \$80,800 rhino head is stolen from British auctioneer for 'black-market' trade. Paul Fraser collectibles.com

<http://www.paulfrasercollectibles.com/section.asp?catid=71&docid=6021>

²⁶ Une corne de rhinocéros volée au Muséum de Rouen France 3.fr, 6 March 2011. <http://haute-normandie.france3.fr/info/une-corne-de-rhinoceros-volee-au-museum-de-rouen-67675682.html>

²⁷ Rhino head theft 'may be linked to international crime ring'. M & H online, undated. www.mandh-online.com/news/content/1566/rhino_head_theft_may_be_linked_to_international_crime_ring

²⁸ Rhinoceros head stolen from Haslemere museum. BBC News, 29 May 2011

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-13588443>

²⁹ Daring rhino horn robbery flops. Expatica.com, 17 June 2011. http://www.expatica.com/be/news/belgian-news/daring-rhino-horn-robbery-flops_157125.html

³⁰ Nashorn-Hörner gestohlen - wohl illegaler Handel In Franken.de 9th June 2011

<http://www.infranken.de/nachrichten/lokales/bamberg/Nashorn-Diebstahl-Museen-Bamberg-Nashorn-Hoerner-gestohlen-wohl-illegaler-Handel;art212,170604>

³¹ Bamberg: Nashorn-Horn aus Museum gestohlen. Frankenpost 6th June 2011

<http://www.frankenpost.de/regional/oberfranken/laenderspiegel/art2388,1663114>

June 4th 2011, Germany - two rhino horns were stolen from a hunting museum. The thieves escaped³².

June 8th 2011, Italy - three rhino horns were stolen from the Museum of Natural History in Florence³³.

July 2nd 2011, Belgium - thieves attempted to steal a rhino head from the Museum of Africa in Tervuren. The suspects were already known to British police for several other thefts³⁴.

July 5th 2011, Belgium - a rhino head was stolen from Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels. Four suspects got away in a vehicle with British registration plates³⁵.

July 7th 2011, Europol announced that it had uncovered an Irish organised crime group illegally trading rhino horn. Group reported to have targeted antique dealers, auction houses, art galleries, museums, private collections and zoos. Auction houses "exploited" in the UK, France, USA and China. The same group, whose activities had been monitored in North and Latin America, South Africa, China and Australia, reported to be involved in other serious crime across the EU such as drug-trafficking, organised robbery, distribution of counterfeit products and money-laundering³⁶.

July 7th 2011, Czech Republic - thieves stole rhino horns from a Czech castle. The hunting trophies from Africa and Asia dated back to 1898³⁷.

July 8th/9th 2011, France – thieves stole a 19th century rhino head from the Museum of Natural History in Blois³⁸.

July 23rd 2011, Sweden – a rhino horn was stolen from the Museum of Natural History in Gothenburg. Reportedly, the thieves took the time to saw off the horns while still in the museum³⁹.

July 23rd/24th, France – a rhino horn dating from 1935 was stolen from the African Museum at l'île d'Aix. Nothing else was taken, leading police to conclude that this was an organised raid, carried out to order⁴⁰.

July 28th 2011, UK - thieves broke into the Ipswich Museum and stole a horn from a Victorian rhino exhibit⁴¹.

August 12th 2011, Belgium - two rhino horns were stolen from the Africa Museum in Namur⁴².

August 26th 2011, the Netherlands - three rhino horns were stolen from the Natural History Museum in Rotterdam after a late night break-in⁴³.

August 27th 2011, UK - two fake rhinoceros horns were stolen from the Natural History Museum in Tring. Three months prior to the theft, staff had replaced the real horns with replicas, after a spate of similar thefts across Europe⁴⁴.

August 31st 2011, UK - two thieves stole the horn from a black rhino exhibit at Drusilla's zoo in East Sussex, after forcing the lock of a glass cabinet⁴⁵.

³² Nashorn-Hörner gestohlen - wohl illegaler Handel In Franken.de 9th June 2011

<http://www.infranken.de/nachrichten/lokales/bamberg/Nashorn-Diebstahl-Museen-Bamberg-Nashorn-Hoerner-gestohlen-wohl-illegaler-Handel;art212,170604>

³³ Rhino horns stolen from city museum. Tuscanyall.com, 7 June 2011

http://www.tuscanyall.com/news_Rhino-horns-stolen-from-city-museum_41.asp

³⁴ Belgian Federal Police CITES info - 2011/5

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ Irish rhino horn racket uncovered by Europol BBC News 7 July 2011. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14066052>

³⁷ Thieves steal rhino horns from Czech castle. The Gazette, Montreal, 7th July 2011

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/travel/Thieves+steal+rhino+horns+from+Czech+castle/5067546/story.html>

³⁸ Une tête de rhinocéros volée au musée d'histoire naturelle de Blois. L'Express.fr, 11 July 2011

http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/1/culture/une-tete-de-rhinoceros-volee-au-musee-d-histoire-naturelle-de-blois_1011343.html

³⁹ Swedish museum hit by rhino horn heist. The Local, 27 July 2011 <http://www.thelocal.se/35186/20110727/>

⁴⁰ Une corne de rhinocéros volée à l'île d'Aix. Charente Libre, 27 July 2011

<http://www.charentelibre.fr/2011/07/27/une-corne-de-rhinoceros-volee-a-l-ile-d-aix,1047568.php>

⁴¹ Ipswich: Rhino horn theft sparks major inquiry. East Anglia Daily Times, 28 July 2011

http://www.eadt.co.uk/news/ipswich_rhino_horn_theft_sparks_major_inquiry_1_977667

⁴² Belgium: Rhino horn gang strikes again. News 24, 12th August 2011

<http://www.news24.com/World/News/Belgium-Rhino-horn-gang-strikes-again-20110811>

⁴³ Gang robs Museum of horns. NOS.NL <http://translate.google.com/translate?js=n&prev=t&hl=nl&ie=UTF-8&layout=2&eotf=1&sl=nl&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fnos.nl%2Fartikel%2F267679-bende-berooft-museum-van-hoorns.html&act=url>

⁴⁴ Raiders steal fake rhino horns in Britain. AFP. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hhkbbNqt5-iP7XBsHnneilE43gnQ?docId=CNG.b8c6206079ef2416b87f96a4bc571f48.b1>

Recommendations

- Parties should immediately inform museums, auction houses - and other locations that house rhino horns - of the threat posed by thieves and of the urgent need to enhance security at these locations.
- Museums or other public places that display preserved rhinos should, ideally, replace the horns with artificial replicas, as has been done in two facilities in the United Kingdom⁴⁶.
- Failing that, museums, auction houses and other facilities that have rhino horns on display should ensure that their exhibits are adequately protected. Facilities that are unable to guarantee the security of their rhino horns should cease to display or advertise them.
- Museum and other exhibits of rhino horn, whether private or public, should be regarded as part of a national stockpile and should in consequence be identified, marked, registered and secured in accordance with Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev CoP15).

⁴⁵ Drusillas zoo clack rhino horn stolen. BBC news. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-14756061>

⁴⁶ Epidemic of UK rhino horn thefts linked to one criminal gang. Guardian.co.uk, 8 August 2011
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/aug/08/rhino-horn-thefts-chinese-medicine>