

Kenya seizes four tons of ivory as elephant slaughter surges

NAIROBI, KENYA: Kenyan customs officers have seized almost four tons of elephant ivory in two separate shipments, officials said as Africa sees a surge in poaching of the threatened animals.



"One haul of ivory weighing some 1,900kgs was discovered at the Indian Ocean port city of Mombasa, hidden under bags of sesame seeds," said Kenya Revenue Authority official Fatma Yusuf.

"A further two tons of ivory was discovered in another container disguised in a similar manner, with both shipments bound for Turkey," he said.

The seizures are the latest of several large hauls uncovered in Kenya, representing the massacre of scores, if not hundreds, of elephants.

In addition, over 500kgs of pangolin scales - indicating dozens of the threatened scaly anteaters were hunted - were seized. Pangolin scales are used in traditional medicine and as fashion accessories in Asia.

Sharp rise in poaching

As in other parts of Africa, poaching of elephants, as well as rhinos and other animals, has risen sharply in Kenya in recent years. Whole herds of elephants have been massacred for their ivory.

In July, over four tons were seized in two shipments, one hidden beneath peanuts and the other mixed in with stinking dried fish. Both shipments were destined for Malaysia.

Kenya Wildlife Service director Arthur Tudor said searches at the port were being increased in a bid to stop smugglers.

"We want to ensure that our port is not used as a transit point of ivory," he said. "We have to step up the war on poachers to completely wipe out the ivory trade. It is threatening elephant populations in the country and entire region."

Ivory trade is banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Africa is now home to an estimated 472 000 elephants, whose survival is threatened by poaching as well as population expansion and increasing urbanisation encroaching on natural habitats.

The illegal ivory trade, estimated to be worth up to US\$10bn a year, is mostly fuelled by demand in Asia and the Middle East.

Elephant tusks are used to make ornaments and rhinoceros horns are used in traditional medicine.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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