



AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION®

Signs of Hope



As governments appear to be taking more concerted action against wildlife trafficking, AWF is doing its part to halt the crisis

In June 2014, Kenyan authorities arrested a Mombasa businessman and known ivory kingpin, Feisal Mohamed Ali. Ali and several accomplices were caught in possession of nearly 2 tonnes of ivory. The arrest would have been a milestone event in Kenya's fight against wildlife trafficking... had Ali not disappeared from police custody soon after.

The kingpin remained a fugitive until an Interpol operation busted him six months later in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Ali was extradited back to Kenya, but his trial had its fair share of mishaps: Key evidence disappeared, the Mombasa building where Ali was originally arrested was torn down and so on. What would the final court ruling be on this landmark case?

The ruling came out on Friday, July 22. Not only was Ali found guilty, but he was also sentenced to 20 years in prison and fined Ksh 20 million—about US\$200,000. His accomplices were acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Recognizing a serious issue

Ali's case may be illustrative of the entire battle against wildlife trafficking: uneven in its handling, yes, but with signs of hope. Could there be a light at the end of this long, dark tunnel?

Certainly, efforts by conservation organizations such as AWF have helped create an environment where wildlife trafficking is now recognized as a serious issue. Thanks to AWF's judicial sensitization workshops, for example, magistrates and prosecutors are increasingly seeking out stronger punishments for wildlife criminals.

These gatherings also go a long way toward enhancing regional cooperation, as people get a rare opportunity to compare notes about their respective wildlife laws. AWF hosted an East Africa regional workshop with Kenya's Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions earlier this year, attended by representatives from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and



TOP: With pangolins the most trafficked animal on Earth, the global community recently voted to increase protections of the animal at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (or CITES). ABOVE: Governments appear to be taking more severe action against ivory trafficking.

Uganda. Ahead of the workshop, AWF Law Enforcement Manager Didi Wamukoya had conducted a comparative analysis of wildlife laws in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. What she discovered was a huge discrepancy in the penalties being meted out



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for wildlife crimes. “Knowing this, wildlife criminals are transferring their activities to the countries that have weaker penalties,” she said. “So one of the biggest recommendations we would make is to harmonize the wildlife laws across the region.”

After the workshop, participants expressed a desire to create a regional network of wildlife crime prosecutors that would allow for continued engagement. AWF is following up with the East African Association of Prosecutors to see if this body may prove a good anchor for such a network.

Sustained success

Meanwhile, AWF's detection dogs and handlers are seeing sustained success in rooting out wildlife products in Kenya and Tanzania. Between January and July of this year, the AWF-trained teams made 26 busts, the majority at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. Among the bigger finds have been a 500-kg lot of pangolin scales, as well as 65 kg of ivory en route from Mozambique. More consistent have been smaller, “shopping-bag” amounts of pangolin, as well as ivory trinkets that tourists were likely trying to bring home for personal use. The busts made by the AWF-trained teams

are said to represent half of the finds at Jomo Kenyatta in the last seven years.

Will Powell, director of AWF's canine program, has witnessed a noticeable reduction in trafficking attempts, particularly of ivory, in the locations where the canine units are deployed. Teams are reportedly seeing an increase in pangolin trafficking, perhaps a sign that traffickers are adjusting their efforts to thwart dog detection.

Those carrying smaller amounts of ivory home are also changing their tactics. Whereas before they had hidden their ivory inside of cardboard boxes or bags, people are now burying their trinkets inside cans of coffee or powdered milk where the scent might throw the dogs off. The dogs still sniff out the ivory.

AWF is expanding upon this success with the graduation of a second class of detection dogs and handlers. All 12 of the handlers in this class are from Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), and have since deployed to critical areas in Uganda.

To more closely connect the Canines for Conservation Program with our judicial efforts, AWF is planning a workshop

next year to bring together prosecutors with detection dog handlers, providing education on how to process canine-found evidence and use it in court.

Litmus tests

Ultimately, stopping wildlife trafficking comes down to government will. Are countries serious about cracking down?

Ali's conviction appears to show Kenya's intent. Meanwhile, China—the biggest ivory-consuming country in the world—earlier this year announced a continuation to 2019 of its one-year ban on African ivory carvings and trophy-hunted ivory. But other litmus tests await. Coming up in Tanzania, for example: the trial of Yang Fenglan, the “Ivory Queen,” purportedly the head of an international ivory trafficking ring. Her trial has been delayed a number of times.

“For a long time, governments and other organizations had been paying lip service to the idea of shutting down wildlife trafficking—but they had been unable, or unwilling, to make the hard choices to get there. We are hopefully moving toward zero tolerance of wildlife trafficking,” said Philip Muruthi, AWF vice president for species protection. ■

Sustainable Protection

Your support helped create a rapid response unit and enabled other interventions for elephants in West Africa

Spanning three protected areas—one each in Niger, Benin and Burkina-Faso—the Parc W landscape is among the most important stretches of wild lands in West Africa. It encompasses terrestrial, semi-aquatic and aquatic ecosystems found at the intersection of these three countries. As important, the landscape hosts some of the last herds of elephants in West Africa.

Even before the results of the first-ever pan-African elephant census showed just how much savanna elephant numbers have dropped in the past several years, AWF recognized the urgency of protecting Parc W's elephants, which have been under threat from both illegal ivory trafficking and human–elephant conflict. Last year, AWF leveraged an Urgent Response Fund (URF) grant to implement anti-poaching activities in this landscape.

Because the majority of elephants tend to gather in the Pendjari Biosphere Reserve in Benin, URF activities were concentrated there. The grant allowed Dr. Chabi Djagoun, a Benin national and wildlife ecologist at the University of Abomey-Calavi's Laboratory of Applied Ecology, to help wildlife authorities establish Pendjari's first-ever rapid response unit.

Consisting of six rangers, the unit carries out anti-poaching patrols and intelligence gathering, responds to incidents of human–elephant conflict and conducts community outreach. AWF supplied four motorbikes to support the unit's efforts, plus a generous pot of money to cover fuel costs. Already the unit has made a difference, recently working with an informer network that led to the eventual arrest of a poacher who had killed an elephant and removed its tusks.

Village outreach

Analysis of previously collected poaching data found that elephant poaching hotspots were concentrated along the edges of the Pendjari Reserve—indicating higher involvement of local people in poaching. Djagoun therefore began conducting outreach to local villages. He hosted a number of workshops in the local language, making use of graphics, photographs and other materials to aid understanding of conservation issues.

In the coming months, the URF grant will allow AWF to extend its efforts across a broader portion of the Parc W landscape. In March, Djagoun had trained 25 rangers in the W Biosphere Reserve in ecological monitoring and anti-poaching techniques, covering camera trap use, field data collection and more. Supplementing the training was much-needed equipment that included 20 tents, 20 water bottles, four cameras and two flashlights.

Plans are now underway to establish a rapid response unit there, similar to the unit now operating in Pendjari. The URF will further fund efforts to raise awareness for elephant corridors in the area and procure camera traps and radios to reinforce surveillance work in Pendjari and W. These will be supplemented with a judicial sensitization workshop.

“Much of the public and media attention around elephant poaching has been concentrated in East, Central and Southern Africa, but we cannot forget this very important population of elephants in the Parc W landscape,” said Philip Muruthi, AWF's vice president for species protection. “These interventions will make certain that this population remains strong and well-protected.” ■



With the first-ever pan-African elephant census having found a shocking drop in elephant numbers, it's more important than ever to protect elephant populations such as this one in the Parc W landscape.



A white rhino in Save Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe, where AWF has provided funding for a Special Species Support Unit.

Importance of Intelligence

Paramilitary efforts are still useful, but these days, stopping the killing of wildlife also requires intelligence gathering

AWF continues to provide Urgent Response Fund (URF) grants to help partners in their anti-poaching efforts. Grantees leverage this support to meet a variety of needs, including supplying new equipment, establishing rapid response units and enhancing wildlife authorities' ability to conduct intelligence gathering. The latter has been a particularly useful method for stopping the killing on the ground; intelligence gathering can help stop poaching attempts in the planning phase—and also put repeat criminals behind bars.

Such was the case in Save Valley Conservancy in Zimbabwe, where AWF has provided funding for a Special Species Support Unit and for ranch reservist scouts. In 2015, the species support unit made contact with some of Zimbabwe's most notorious rhino poachers. This led to the December arrests of a poaching middle man, Mudenge Munashe Mugwira, and a field mastermind, Tavengwa Machona Mazhongwe. In early 2016, both were sentenced to 35 years in prison after pleading

guilty to three counts of rhino poaching. Ongoing support from AWF has enabled the Save Valley Conservancy to keep poaching numbers below its rhino population's natural birth rate.

Similarly, Game Rangers International uses URF funding to

support the work of the Investigation and Intelligence Unit in Zambia's Department of National Parks and Wildlife. This was the unit responsible for helping Interpol arrest alleged ivory trafficker Ben Simasiku in 2014. Simasiku is currently awaiting trial in Livingstone, Zambia.

Today the unit continues to do more reconnaissance work, including efforts to nab other high-level wildlife criminals. In January, Game Rangers International worked with the unit to conduct a fact-finding operation on the whereabouts of an Interpol-wanted suspect, an elephant and rhino trader. Another, ongoing operation is working to catch Chinese nationals dealing ivory between Malawi and Zambia. So effective has Game Rangers International's work with the unit been that in the first quarter of 2016, the unit arrested 146 suspects, recovered 388 kg of ivory and confiscated 889 kg of bushmeat. More recently, the unit confiscated two rhino horns being trafficked through Zambia from Namibia. That case is currently in court.

But it seems one can never rest easy, even with these successes. Aside from its support of the Investigation and Intelligence Unit, Game Rangers International does a lot of anti-poaching work in and around Kafue National Park. "The ivory poaching in Kafue was quite quiet until about a month ago when there was a big spike in killings," reported Sport Beattie, founder and CEO of Game Rangers International, in June.

It's for that reason that AWF continues to work with partners on the ground—supporting a variety of needs, from equipment to intelligence. ■

Intelligence gathering is helping with rhino protection work in Southern Africa—thanks to your support of AWF.

