

May 3, 2017

Alleged Rhino Horn Kingpin Arrested

On April 27, 2017, in cooperation with Hoan Kiem District Police and Ha Dong District Police, Unit 2 of the Anti-Smuggling Police Department arrested Nguyen Mau Chien, the suspected leader of a major criminal network that traffics rhino horn, ivory, tigers and other high value wildlife products to Vietnam. The arrest followed the seizure of 33kg of rhino horn at the Hanoi train station earlier on the morning of the 27th during which two of Chien's associates were arrested.

The arrest of Nguyen Mau Chien is likely to be a significant blow to a major criminal network that has been building operations in African countries.

Thursday's arrests followed an extensive investigation by police and surveillance of Chien's network operations. Following the rhino horn seizure at the train station, police raided Chien's Hanoi home and seized raw ivory, more rhino horn, several frozen tiger cubs, an assortment of ivory products as well as other wildlife products.

"ENV congratulates Hanoi authorities, especially Unit 2 of the Anti-smuggling Police Department. This is a breakthrough for our collective efforts to dismantle major wildlife trafficking networks in the spirit of Directive 28/CT-TTg dated September 12, 2016 by the Prime Minister", said Bui Thi Ha, the vice-director of ENV.



Confiscated rhino horn at HN train station and Chien's associate

Photo: Anti-Smuggling Police Department

Chien's activities have been closely monitored by relevant authorities, as his network has been linked to numerous incidents of illegally trading and smuggling wildlife since 2007 when Chien was arrested in Tanzania and fined for transporting wildlife products. From 2015 to 2016, tonnes of ivory, rhino horn and pangolin scales confiscated in major ports in Haiphong, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City were also suspected to belong to Chien and several criminal cases in African countries are also linked to Chien's network.

Thursday's breakthrough follows a string of successes by Vietnamese authorities resulting in arrests and prosecutions of wildlife traffickers. In 2016, a five-year prison sentence was imposed on an internet wildlife trader, and an indictment handed down in the case of two brothers operating a major marine turtle trade network in Khanh Hoa that culminated with raids in 2014 and the seizure of more than 10 tonnes of marine turtles.

"We have seen prosecution of pangolin traders and heightened intelligence-led enforcement resulting in seizures and arrests across the board", says Douglas Hendrie, an expert on wildlife trafficking who currently serves as an advisor to ENV. "However targeting the leadership of criminal enterprises is a significant and critical step forward", says Hendrie. "The only way we are going to really have an impact on wildlife crime in Vietnam is to go after the criminals that lead these enterprises, not the guys on the ground. This process has clearly begun."

Nguyen Mau Chien is originally from Thanh Hoa province where he owns a tiger farm. Chien has long been suspected of laundering tigers through his farm and evidence from inspections lends credibility to

this suspicion. Chien got his start selling fake tiger bones, later acquiring a number of tiger cubs illegally that formed the foundation of his breeding stock at the farm. Over 10 years ago, Chien was identified as a major tiger trader with links to a number of tiger seizures. However, over the past five years, he surfaced in Africa and appeared to be expanding his operation considerably with his people focusing mainly on rhino horn, ivory and pangolin scales.

ENDS

For more information, please contact

Communications Team

Education for Nature – Vietnam

communication@envietnam.org

Tel/Fax: +84 4 6281 5424/ +84 4 6281 5423

Website: www.envietnam.org Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EducationforNatureVietnam>

About ENV

Education for Nature – Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and the protection of the environment. ENV combats the illegal wildlife trade and aims to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about the need to protect nature and wildlife.

ENV employs creative and innovative strategies to influence public attitudes and reduce demand for wildlife trade products. ENV works closely with government partners to strengthen policy and legislation, and directly supports enforcement efforts in the protection of endangered species of regional, national, and global significance.

Since 2007, ENV has focused its activities on three major program areas that comprise ENV's integrated strategic approach for addressing illegal wildlife trade in Vietnam. These include:

- Reducing consumer demand for wildlife products through investment in a long-term and sustained effort to influence public attitudes and behavior.
- Strengthening enforcement through direct support and assistance to law enforcement agencies, and mobilizing active public participation in helping combat wildlife crime.
- Working with policy-makers to strengthen legislation, close loopholes in the law, and promote sound policy and decision-making relevant to wildlife protection.