

Global police in 'huge' wildlife contraband haul: Europol

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Workers put ivory items on a sliding belt before being destroyed in Beijing on May 29, 2015

Global police have seized "huge amounts" of wildlife contraband, including some 12 tonnes of ivory, as well as rhino horn and whale bones, in a massive operation across 62 countries, Europol said Thursday.

"Operation COBRA III, the biggest ever coordinated international law enforcement operation targeting the illegal trade in [endangered species](#), has led to the recovery of a huge amount of wildlife contraband," Europe's [police](#) agency said in a statement.

In a separate statement issued in Bangkok, one of the operations' organisers, the Association of Southeastern Asian Nations' Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN) said COBRA III resulted in at least 300 arrests.

This included "kingpins and over 600 seizures of assorted wildlife contraband," it said.

Eight suspected kingpins arrested included a Chinese national involved in Namibia's biggest rhino horn smuggling case and a notorious elephant poacher in India, it added.

The two-month-long operation involving 62 European, African, American and Asian states saw police seize 119 [rhino horns](#), with 11,439 dead and live specimens recovered in Europe alone, Europol said from its Hague-based headquarters.

It included 16 whale ribs in the Netherlands, 20 kilogrammes (441 pounds) of live leeches in Bulgaria and 10,000 dead seahorses and 400 live tortoises and turtles in Britain and 300 in Croatia.

In Thailand, police seized more than four tonnes of ivory hidden in containers originating in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



Carved ivory is shown to the media before being destroyed in Beijing on May 29, 2015

The shipping of ivory has been banned since 1989 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

In India, nearly 11,000 kilogrammes of suspected tigers' bones were found.

Chinese and German police meanwhile confiscated around 800 cacti plants, while 50 kilogrammes of unworked ivory were found in France.

"Investigations continue in many countries," Europol said.



Eight suspected kingpins were arrested in the operation, including a Chinese national involved in Namibia's biggest rhino horn smuggling case

Europol, who supported the operation said COBRA III was organised by ASEAN-WEN and the Lusaka Agreement Task Force, consisting of seven African countries.

Said Europol's director Rob Wainwright: "The trafficking of endangered species remains a problem in the EU and beyond."

"Operation COBRA III once again shows the true global dimension of these crimes," Wainwright said.

"We will continue our efforts to fight these cruel crimes, to ensure a safe environment for endangered species in Europe and all over the world,"

he said.

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