

Gabon says major ivory trafficking ring dismantled, 10 held

January 20 2018, by Christopher Torchia



In this file photo dated July 4, 2001, aerial photo, a lone elephant grazes at a clearing in the rain forest of Lope Reserve, Gabon. Gabon's national parks agency said Saturday Jan. 20, 2018, that a major trafficking ring that smuggled some six tons of ivory out of the country in 2017, has been dismantled, in a victory against poachers who have killed large numbers of forest elephants in the Central African country of Gabon. (AP Photo/Saurabh Das, FILE)

Gabon says a major trafficking ring that smuggled six tons of ivory out

of the country in 2017 has been dismantled, in a victory against poachers who have killed large numbers of forest elephants in the Central African country.

The Chadian head of the syndicate, Abdoulaye Mohamoud Ibrahim, and eight accomplices, including his wife, son and daughter-in-law, were arrested on Nov. 1 after a two-year investigation assisted by Interpol and French law enforcement, Gabon's national parks agency said. The ring's "moneyman" was arrested three weeks later.

The arrests were not immediately announced because the investigation was continuing and suspects would have gone "underground" if there had been publicity, the parks service director, Lee White, said in an email to The Associated Press. He said the suspects could be imprisoned for at least 10 years if convicted on organized crime charges.

NGOs that help to make arrests tend to publicize them "in part to put pressure on the prosecutors and judges to try the case in a transparent manner and in part as a fundraising strategy," White said. "When we make arrests it inevitably leads to new intelligence that allows us to work our way up to the kingpins."

Gabon has Africa's biggest [population](#) of [forest elephants](#), which are harder to monitor and count than savannah elephants because they live in dense vegetation. However, a Duke University study released a year ago revealed the toll of poaching, concluding that the elephant population in Minkébé National Park in northeast Gabon had dropped by about 80 percent, or more than 25,000 [elephants](#), between 2004 and 2014.

Well-protected elephant populations are recovering in some parks in Gabon, including along the Atlantic coast, according to White.

Gabon has deployed the military in some areas to protect wildlife.

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