

Uganda seizes 750 pieces of ivory, arrests two Vietnamese

January 31 2019, by Rodney Muhumuza

Ugandan authorities have seized 750 pieces of ivory and thousands of pangolin scales being smuggled from neighboring South Sudan, the revenue agency said Thursday, in one of the largest seizures of wildlife contraband in the East African country.

Two Vietnamese nationals are in custody over the contraband that had been concealed inside pieces of timber carried by three freight containers, the Uganda Revenue Authority said.

The elephant tusks and pangolin scales were likely collected in neighboring Congo, the authority said. The contraband was detected with the aid of a scanner.

The seizure proves Uganda "still is a major transit point for illegal wildlife," Kristof Titeca, a Belgian researcher who recently investigated the role of individual traders in ivory trafficking, said in a Twitter post.

Africa's pangolin species are under increasing pressure from poachers as their scales are used in traditional medicine in some Asian countries.

Africa's elephants are threatened by demand for ivory products in China and other Asian countries. Africa had 1.3 million elephants in the 1970s but has fewer than 500,000 today.

Uganda's elephant population has been growing in recent years to over 5,000, but the animals still face sporadic poaching, sometimes with the

help of corrupt wildlife officials.

Experts warn that elephant populations could plummet if the ivory trade is not stopped.

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Citation: Uganda seizes 750 pieces of ivory, arrests two Vietnamese (2019, January 31) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-01-uganda-seizes-pieces-ivory-vietnamese.html>

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