

IFAW welcomes Dutch seizure of elephant parts

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IFAW - the International Fund for Animal Welfare - today praised Dutch enforcement officials who seized a large illegal shipment containing the body parts of 8 African elephants.

Rosa Hill, press officer for IFAW UK, said: "While we applaud this seizure, it demonstrates that the illegal trade in elephant parts in Europe is rife and is having a devastating impact on vulnerable elephant populations in Africa and Asia. It also serves as a grave reminder that demand for elephant products is not limited to ivory. Grizzly collectibles such as elephant footstools are often seized by customs authorities."

The shipment is reported to have contained 22 legs, 8 tusks, 3 tails, a skull and a complete elephant hide, along with skulls and hides from a species of endangered antelope. It was intercepted at Schiphol airport in Amsterdam by the general inspection service and customs last week. The consignment was on route from southern Africa to destinations in Spain, Portugal and the Czech Republic.

Other large seizures of elephant parts have been made recently elsewhere in Europe. Last November, 142 items worth £60,000 were seized by police in the UK. In July 2004, the Spanish police seized almost 3 tonnes of ivory and 110kg of elephant hair, some of which had been turned into jewellery.

An IFAW investigation found thousands of ivory items for sale - on UK High Streets and over the internet - last year. Many of the items were being traded illegally without proper documentation.

"Entire species are literally being traded to extinction because people have put a commercial price on an elephant's head. Sadly, this type of crime will continue as long as consumers are willing to pay high prices for such products. IFAW is calling for increased international co-operation between enforcement agencies to safeguard the future of elephants", said Rosa Hill.

African and Asian elephants are protected under international law. All cross-border trade in elephant products requires proper documentation, which was absent in the Amsterdam seizure. The Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) recently granted permission to South Africa and Namibia to trade in elephant leather and hair - a move opposed by IFAW on the basis that any legal trade can act as a smokescreen for poachers to launder illegal products on the market.