

CASE STUDY

5

COMMODITIES INVOLVED

Wildlife (various) and gold/precious stones

CONVERGENCE TYPOLOGY

Diversification of commodities

GEOGRAPHIC REGION

Various



Over the years, the Wildlife Justice Commission has identified many instances of criminal networks involved in large-scale wildlife trafficking that are also involved in smuggling gold and precious stones in the black market. Although information in these cases is limited as the Wildlife Justice Commission has not pursued any further investigation into the smuggling of precious metals and stones, the volume of instances points to this potentially being a notable convergence typology in certain geographic locations. Some examples recorded by the Wildlife Justice Commission include the following:

- **In September 2017**, intelligence was received that an Indian national from Chennai who was involved in smuggling tortoises and turtles was also involved in smuggling gold from the Middle East to India. It was

stated that this trade had become lucrative due to the amount of money that could be made by avoiding customs duty on gold brought into India from abroad.

- **In June 2018**, Wildlife Justice Commission operatives identified a suspect in Kenya who claimed to be able to supply illegal ivory. The case did not progress as the suspect had reportedly sold the ivory before resources could be deployed to corroborate the intelligence and investigate further. However, analysis on this suspect indicated he was also involved in the procurement and sale of gold, although the exact nature of his role in the industry was not known.
- **Information was obtained** during an investigation in October 2018 that a Congolese national in Uganda was able to supply both ivory and gold. Both commodities were suspected to be sourced from the Democratic Republic of Congo and it is believed that they were smuggled to buyers in Uganda.
- **Operatives identified** a suspect in Malawi in November 2018 who was involved in ivory trafficking as well as the illegal mining and subsequent illegal export of precious and semi-precious stones. It is believed that the ivory and stones were moved through the same transportation channels to customers in Asia.
- **In March 2019**, the Wildlife Justice Commission received intelligence that a West African criminal network operating across Nigeria and several oth-

er countries in the region were involved in the procurement and supply of ivory as well as smuggling of gold. The network was believed to be using the movement of gold to fund procurements in its wildlife business and as a method to conceal cross-border financial transactions.

- **In April 2020**, operatives identified a Nigerian suspect who was involved in the supply of large-scale quantities of ivory and pangolin scales and transportation of these products to multiple Asian destinations. This suspect was also able to source other valuable commodities, including gold.

There have been anecdotal reports of an increased convergence between several illicit commodity trades in South Africa, including gold, chrome, copper, and rhino horn.²⁶ There is an apparent convergence in the smuggling methods for gold bars and rhino horns, with gold bars commonly smuggled in hand luggage on flights from South Africa to Dubai,²⁷ which is also how rhino horn is often moved before travelling on to destinations in Asia. Cash, gold bars, and precious stones were also reported to be among the products seized by USFWS officials in a 2012 rhino horn trafficking case in the United States.²⁸ It is possible that these commodities are used to hide illicit proceeds when smuggling wildlife commodities or could be used in exchange for payments of products. For example, in the shark fin trafficking case

study in this report, the illicit proceeds were deposited into third-party business accounts that dealt in gold, precious metals, and jewels, to hide the illegal activities (see Case Study 7).



Image 7: USFWS officials seized more than USD 2 million in cash, gold bars and precious stones, along with rhino horns and other wildlife products in a 2012 case. Credit: USFWS.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

- **Organised crime group mapping** is a technique to assess the level of criminality of a group and prioritise investigation efforts on those groups that pose the greatest threat. As this technique is focused on networks, it lends itself well to identifying convergence and groups that are involved in a variety of different crimes.

²⁶ <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/2020-12-03-inside-sas-heist-culture-gold-guns-and-gangs/>

²⁷ <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-02-11-dubai-to-crack-down-on-gold-smugglers-travelling-to-the-emirate-state-via-south-africa/>

²⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-xpm-2013-may-15-la-me-rhino-horns-20130516-story.html>