

VIETNAMESE NATIONAL ARRESTED OVER RHINO HORN

BY GERALD TENYWA

The Police at Entebbe airport are holding Thai Xuan Tuan, a national of Vietnam in Asia, over rhino horns.

According to Abiaz Rwamwiri, the communications officer at Africa Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Xuan was arrested on Friday at Entebbe airport with the help of sniffer dogs. Xuan was travelling to Vietnam via Qatar in the Middle East.

Rwamwiri said Xuan entered Uganda from Kenya by road and was intercepted with seven rhino horns. In addition, Xuan had smaller pieces that had been cut out of a bigger piece of a rhino horn.

The contraband was stashed in a shiny cylindrical container, which looked like a decoration. This was exposed by the highly trained dogs that detected the smell and helped to arrest the suspected trafficker, according to Rwamwiri.

"We trained the dogs (a canine unit) and the handlers from Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and last night they did not let us down," said Rwamwiri, adding that they arrested the

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Vietnamese national who thought it would be easy to smuggle trophies out of Entebbe airport.

Dr Andrew Seguya, UWA's executive director, said the suspect had been elusive to security that was checking physically, but he could not beat the canine unit.

"The dogs cannot take a bribe and they arrested the suspect," he said.

He also pointed out that Uganda has not lost any rhino, meaning that the rhino horns were from outside the country.

"We are concerned about the death of rhinos and are strengthening our laws to fight wildlife crime."

Vietnam is described by the National Geographic Channel as the biggest hub in the world for trafficking in

horns and other body parts of the rhinoceros, a critically endangered species, which is being killed by poachers in different parts of Africa.

Rhinos are categorised as endangered species on the red data list of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), meaning that if nothing is done to protect them and their habitat, they will become extinct.

Convention on Trade in Endangered Species, has in recent meetings been engaged in working with countries to curtail poaching of globally endangered species, including the rhinos.

Uganda has only 22 rhinos. Two of the rhinos are being kept at the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) also known as Entebbe Zoo for conservation education. The rest of the rhinos are kept at Nakasongola Rhino Sanctuary (Zziwa Rhino Sanctuary) for breeding and re-introduction into the wilderness.

Uganda previously had two species of rhinos namely the black rhinos and the northern white rhinos which were declared extinct in the early 1980s. This is blamed on the political turmoil and civil unrest that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s before peace was restored.



Xuan with the rhino horns he had carried