



UNITED STATES ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
District of Minnesota

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**YIWEI ZHENG SENTENCED TO PAY \$500,000 FINE FOR SMUGGLING ELEPHANT
IVORY AND RHINOCEROS HORNS**

Defendant also sentenced to intermittent confinement and 150 hours community service

United States Attorney Andrew M. Luger and Ed Grace, Deputy Assistant Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), today announced the sentencing of YIWEI ZHENG, A/K/A “Steve Zheng,” 43, for smuggling elephant ivory and illegally exporting rhinoceros horns from the United States to China.

ZHENG was ordered to pay \$500,000 into the Lacey Act Reward Fund, which is used by USFWS to reward those who provide information about wildlife crimes and to pay the costs incurred in caring for fish, wildlife or plants that are being held as evidence in ongoing investigations. The defendant was also sentenced to serve three years’ probation, a six-week period of intermittent confinement, and to perform 150 hours of community service.

Under the Lacey Act, it is unlawful to import, export, transport, sell or purchase wildlife, fish or plants that were taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of a state, federal or foreign law. When it was passed in 1900, the Lacey Act became the first federal law protecting wildlife.

“Those who engage in this illegal trade create demand, and a market for, the exploitation of endangered species such as black rhinoceros,” said Assistant United States Attorney Laura M. Provinzino. “This defendant helped to sustain this illegal market for years, engaging in more than 300 sales and earning more than \$1 million. His profit was earned at the expense of these threatened and endangered species.”

“Stopping wildlife trafficking and trade in ivory and rhino continues to be a huge conservation priority for us,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Deputy Assistant Director for Law Enforcement Ed Grace. “It takes all of us to protect these endangered species, here and around the world.”

According to the defendant’s guilty plea and documents filed in court, on April 30, 2011, ZHENG smuggled elephant ivory out of the United States to a recipient in Shanghai, China.

ZHENG also violated the Lacey Act by exporting two rhinoceros horns from the U.S. between July 25, 2010 and July 27, 2010, with knowledge that the two rhinoceros horns were transported and sold in violation of the laws and regulations of the United States, including the Endangered Species Act.

ZHENG operated an online business known as *Crouching Dragon Antiques*. As part of this business, ZHENG offered for sale and sold a variety of items, including items made of elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn. On May 5, 2011, U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers identified a package containing a number of elephant ivory carvings being shipped from the United States to an individual in Shanghai, China. The shipper was identified as YIWEI ZHENG. The ivory contained within the shipment had not been declared to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service upon export nor had ZHENG obtained any Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) permits for the ivory being exported as required.

In total, ZHENG smuggled into and out of the United States and sold in China and elsewhere, elephant ivory, rhinoceros horn and other items worth more than \$1,000,000.

ZHENG pleaded guilty on January 13, 2016, and was sentenced today by U.S. District Chief Judge John R. Tunheim in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis.

This case is the result of an investigation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Laura M. Provinzino.

Defendant Information:

YIWEI ZHENG, A/K/A “Steve Zheng,” 43
St. Cloud, Minn.

Convicted:

- Smuggling goods from the United States, 1 count
- Violation of the Lacey Act, 1 count

Sentenced:

- \$500,000 fine payable to the Lacey Act Reward Fund
- Three years’ probation
- Six weeks of intermittent confinement
- 150 hours community service

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