Service Law Enforcement Assisted in Nepal’s Burn of Wildlife Products

May 26, 2017

On May 22, 2017, over 4,000 pieces of confiscated wildlife parts and products were burnt at the Chitwan National Park in Nepal’s Terai District. The government of Nepal publically destroyed these items to emphasize their commitment to stop poaching and end wildlife trafficking. The event was attended by hundreds of people including many conservation leaders from around the world. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) was represented by the Special Agent in Charge of the International Operations Unit (SAC-IOU), the Senior Special Agent Attaché stationed in Bangkok, Thailand, and an IT specialist.

OLE provided many levels of assistance to Nepal. For the last two years, the attaché, an IT specialist, and a forensic scientist for the National Forensics Laboratory have worked with the Nepali government providing expert guidance, high-tech equipment, and other resources as needed to ensure the success of this significant event.

In 2015, the attaché first met with Nepali officials to assess the stockpile and develop the logistical flow to destroy the wildlife products. In the summer of 2016, the attaché, IT specialist, and forensic scientist, worked with Nepali officials to organize, photograph, and document the inventory; develop a database; collect scientific samples of the wildlife products; and draft regulatory procedures for stockpile management, which were used as guidance for this burn and will be used as a foundation for future similar events.

Arriving a few days before the event, an OLE team, comprised of the SAC-IOU, the attaché, and the IT specialist, supported Nepali officials with preparations at the site, including protocols for "de-inventory" processing, security protocols, third party observation, and stacking on the incinerator.

On the morning of the burn and under tight security, the wildlife material, minus the forensic samples previously selected in 2016, were stacked upon a custom incineration platform at the Shree Battalion Headquarters of the Nepali Army.

In total, over 4,000 specimens from 48 species of rare wildlife were documented and either destroyed or properly cataloged and stored. The specimens were vast and varied and included parts or products
from animals such as rhinos, elephants, tigers, leopards, pangolins, gharials, hornbills, otters, red pandas, and seahorses.

The stockpile had been gathered over the last 20 years and stored at several secure locations across Nepal. Most of the products were seized during law enforcement operations; however, some of the animals had died from natural causes. For the items that had been seized, all of the cases had been adjudicated. Any links to casework or file numbers were documented, and the pieces were measured, photographed, QR coded, and microchipped. The documentation was saved in a database system, specially designed by OLE, and was set up as a cutting-edge, mobile accessioning system. The Nepali group National Trust for the Conservation of Nature (NTNC) coordinated the burn and OLE’s expertise was performed in concert with several Nepali government agencies and the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN).

The Executive Director of the NTNC wrote, “…Thank you to the USFWS for trusting us and providing unconditional support. I would also like to thank the attaché, and others from the USFWS team, for their technical support in the process. This would not have been possible without their support and advice…”

Nepal’s stockpile had an estimated black market value between $50-100 million and included a vast array of illegal wildlife products. Credit: USFWS

350 rhinoceros horns were documented and then destroyed. Credit: USFWS