



African Pangolin Working Group
Africa Representative to the IUCN-SSC Pangolin Specialist Group

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EXPONENTIAL ESCALATION IN ILLEGAL INTERNATIONAL PANGOLIN TRADE

On 28 May 2014, Hong Kong Customs officials intercepted and inspected a cargo container originating from South Africa. Hidden among the contents of the container were 1,000 kg of pangolin scales, believed to originate from Temminck's Ground Pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*). This is the largest pangolin seizure at this port in the past five years, and the largest ever worldwide involving an African pangolin species.

This most recent seizure comes amidst growing levels of illegal international trade in pangolins and other threatened wildlife species. On 12 May 2014 Chinese officials confiscated 956 frozen Sunda Pangolin (*Manis javanica*) carcasses at Guangdong Province, China. According to Annamiticus, an international NGO monitoring the illegal trade in wild animals, an estimated 8,000 pangolins were traded last year alone while an estimated 117,000–234,000 pangolins have been illegally traded between January 2011 and December 2013.

This trade is having catastrophic effects on the populations of all eight pangolin species, with the Asian pangolin populations showing dramatic declines in recent years. The decrease in Asian pangolin densities has resulted in an increasing reliance on the African pangolin species to supply this insatiable demand. Illegal trade is rife in Central and West Africa, and was known to occur at low levels in southern Africa prior to this incident. This most recent seizure indicates that illegal trade is widespread in southern Africa as well, and is far from being sustainable.

Temminck's Ground Pangolins are listed as *Vulnerable* in South Africa and are protected in terms of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA). Any contraventions in terms of this act carry a maximum penalty of R10 million or ten years imprisonment.

We urge authorities in all range states to take a strong stand against all cases of pangolin poaching and to send a strong message that their country's natural heritage is not there to be plundered. We also urge all pangolin range states worldwide to re-evaluate the trade listing and laws pertaining to pangolins. We applaud the Hong Kong customs officials for their outstanding work and trust that the full weight of the law will be brought to bear on the perpetrators.

The African Pangolin Working Group (APWG) and our partners will continue to monitor trade levels in Africa and engage with the relevant authorities to find workable solutions to combat this growing scourge. Please report any observed or suspected cases of pangolin trafficking to the APWG, or the regional country contact. For more information on pangolins and the research being done to conserve this iconic species please visit our website pangolin.org.za or our Facebook page www.facebook.com/pages/African-Pangolin-Working-Group/513407302073363.

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The African Pangolin Working Group is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving pangolins and their ecosystems in Africa

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