

Press release: Foreign Secretary calls for international effort to tackle wildlife crime

Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson visited the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit (WCU) facility in London today (Monday 19 February) to see illegally traded wildlife products seized by the Met Police before they could be sold on the black market in the UK.

Many of the cases the WCU deals with involve cross-border smuggling and require police collaboration with international agencies, underlining the need for greater international cooperation to tackle the illegal wildlife trade.

The Foreign Secretary saw items seized in successful WCU operations. This includes the recent Abbas Allawi case, where Met Police raided a Watford property using trained search dogs and found wildlife goods with a street value of over £1 million stashed in his attic.

The Foreign Secretary was shown items including seven rhino horns weighing over 16kg, and dozens of raw ivory tusks and carved ivory specimens as well as animal trophies including a stuffed lion's head and tiger skins. He heard how there is online demand for primates, including severed monkey hands turned into trinkets and monkey skulls.

During the visit the Foreign Secretary said:

When we think of the illegal wildlife trade, the slaughter of elephants, rhinos and other species teetering on the brink of extinction, we think of Africa, Asia and distant countries where some think this acceptable. We rarely associate this crime with our own shores. To say I was angry to see the haul of ivory, rhino horns, animal furs and other items in the gross menagerie of seized illegal animal products in London is an understatement.

This is not just a crime taking place overseas. Criminal lowlifes operate right here in the UK and the Met Police and other forces are working to stop them in their tracks. Criminal gangs trafficking wildlife across UK borders will not be permitted to operate with impunity, but this requires a global effort, tackling both the supply and demand of this odious trade.

We will not let up our efforts to ensure that future generations can share our planet with rhinos and elephants and that the criminals who seek to harm them face justice.

The Foreign Secretary also learned about a new technique for taking

fingerprints from ivory. The technique was tested on ivory from the WCU facility from previous seizures, and it increases the chances of building a legal case against perpetrators.

This follows on from the Foreign Secretary's recent visit to Asia where he viewed illegally trafficked ivory and pangolin scales seized by Thai customs.

In October the UK will host an international conference on the illegal wildlife trade, bringing together global leaders to work to end wildlife crime.

Further information