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“Notorious” Cameroon poacher sentenced to three years in jail

Yaoundé, Cameroon (25 September 2013)

After one year of trial, the “notorious” Cameroonian poacher Symphorien Sangha was sentenced on Tuesday to three years in jail, for the killing of elephants, ivory trafficking and wounding a law-enforcement officer, the Boumba-et-Ngoko tribunal in the south east of the country announced yesterday.

Furthermore, Sangha – known locally as the “notorious” poacher – will have to pay a fine of 22,000,000 FCFA (€33,500). If he is unable to do so, another two years will be added to his sentence.

“This is fantastic news. Justice has finally been served,” said Alain Bernard Ononino, a wildlife crime enforcement expert at WWF Cameroon.

Originally from the Central African Republic but a naturalized Cameroonian citizen, Sangha, who specializes in the killing of elephants for their tusks, has also been accused of serving as a guide to Sudanese poachers, who in 2010 crossed the Central African Republic and massacred elephants for their ivory.

He was arrested in October 2012 in Yokadouma, in the south east of the country, and was charged with killing elephants, ivory trafficking, and shooting an ecoguard in June 2010, causing serious physical injury and incapacity.

“Cameroonian authorities deserve high praise and congratulations for this exemplary decision – a textbook example on how to prosecute wildlife criminals.”

“Now, the same tribunal must insure that Symphorien Sangha’s twin brother, Jean René Sangha, who has confessed to being in possession of ivory tusks and a hunting rifle, also goes to jail.”

The Sangha brothers have been active since 2006 in the *Tri-National de la Sangha* complex – a forest of over eight million hectares in Cameroon, the Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic – an area with exceptional biodiversity, with important populations of large mammals, including gorillas and forest elephants.

In July 2012, this forested landscape was declared a UNESCO world heritage site, the first time an area encompassing three countries obtained this distinction.

“This is a unique area, of value to all of humanity, and we all have a responsibility to protect it. To our knowledge, the Sangha brothers killed over 100 elephants in this forest in the past few years,” Ononino said.

“We hope that Cameroonian authorities continue their excellent work in protecting this area,” he added.

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WWF is campaigning for greater protection of threatened species such as rhinos, tigers and elephants. In order to save endangered animals, source, transit and demand countries must all improve law enforcement, customs controls and judicial systems. WWF is also urging governments in consumer countries to undertake demand reduction efforts to curb the use of endangered species products.

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