

Stolen rhino horns could be deadly, says museum

Two 19th-century rhino horns stolen from a South African museum could be deadly if sold as a popular aphrodisiac because they are drenched in poison, a museum official said on Monday.

The "priceless" horns were snatched from a display at the historic mammal gallery in Cape Town on Saturday evening, said Jatti Bredekamp, chief executive of Iziko Museums.

"Unknowingly, the thieves have exposed themselves to more than the danger of arrest and prosecution," Bredekamp said in a statement.

"Before the mid-twentieth century, taxidermy mounts were prepared by being soaked in arsenic and preserved from insect infestation through regular applications of DDT, both highly toxic poisons that retain their toxicity over time," he said.

Bredekamp said the horns were deliberately targeted in a carefully planned robbery, and might be destined for Asia, where ground rhino horns are a prized aphrodisiac.

"This could have unforeseen consequences," he said.

Rhino populations have fallen dramatically over the last few decades as poaching decimated the animals across Africa.

Bredekamp said museums worldwide were being targeted by organised crime to help supply lucrative markets with a wide range of artefacts. After a previous robbery attempt, South African museum officials removed several other specimens of rhino horn from public display, he said. – Reuters

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