



# BOGUS RHINO HUNTERS

Tony Carnie looks at the problem of government-approved rhino killings by bogus 'sport hunters' from China, Thailand and Vietnam and discovers continued abuse of the hunting permit system by organised crime networks. Tony is the environmental writer for The Mercury newspaper in Durban

**M**OST MEDIA HEADLINES ON THE RHINO WAR HAVE ZOOMED IN ON THE ILLEGAL KILLING SPREE BY POACHERS IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK AND OTHER WILDLIFE RESERVES.

Yet hundreds of rhinos have also been slaughtered by bogus "trophy hunters" from the Orient, using and abusing hunting permits issued by government agencies.

The government began to clamp down on the problem in 2008, but these

legally-sanctioned bogus hunts have not stopped.

Government statistics which came to light recently show that almost 200 rhino sport-hunting permits were issued in North West province alone over the past three years. More than 90% of these permits were issued to people from China, Thailand or Vietnam – countries which have little history in trophy-head hunting.

The long list of Eastern trophy-hunters include the likes of Peng Pang Pin, Meng Ho Fu, Ho Viet Cuong or Punpitak Chunchom (see list of examples alongside).

In KwaZulu-Natal, almost 50% of the legally-permitted rhino hunts in 2009

involved Vietnamese nationals (though only a single permit was issued to a Vietnamese national in KwaZulu-Natal last year).

It remains unclear what the situation is in other parts of the country, because the national Department of Environmental Affairs has failed to provide any recent statistics on the number of rhino hunts in the other seven provinces, nor the names and nationalities of the hunters.

This is strange, since the national government claims to monitor all rhino hunting permits in all nine provinces.

However, older statistics suggest that at least 286 horns were exported to Vietnam between 2006 and 2009.