

Beetle hunters found guilty

Melanie Gosling

Two German beetle collectors, convicted for hunting over 200 endangered Cape stag beetles highly priced on international collectors' markets, were sentenced in the Paarl Regional Court to a fine of R60 000 each or six years in jail yesterday.

Albert Rautenstrauch (42) and his cousin Günter Karl Rautenstrauch (44) were each sentenced to a further R1 500 or three months in jail for hunting hundreds of other insects, some of them poached from Cape Nature Conservation nature reserves.

Two friends of the Rautenstrauchs, who were not beetle collectors but had gone on holiday with them and helped collect the insects, received light sentences. Werner Johann Lenz (39) was sentenced to a fine of R500 or 10 days' jail. Wolfgang Schubert (34) was sentenced to R1 000 or 20 days' jail.

All four men are from Augsburg, Germany.

The Western Cape Nature Conservation Ordinance makes provision for a maximum fine of R100 000 or 10 years in jail for hunting endangered species.

Some of the endangered Cape

stag beetles, of the Colophon genus, which the Germans had hunted during highly-organised collecting sprees in the Western Cape in December and January, are sold for between R1 500 and R6 000 each.

The magistrate, Annemarie Immelman, said during sentencing that she would not consider imposing an additional penalty of three times the commercial value of the beetles. She said she agreed with the magistrate in another case, which involved a man convicted of crayfish poaching, who had described this additional "commercial value" penalty as "draconian".