

'Tourists' bust for stealing rare beetles

JEANNE VAN DER MERWE

ENDANGERED beetles have landed four German "tourists" in court on bug-stealing charges.

The four, who the state alleges are insect traders, were arrested at a roadblock near Ceres two weeks ago on their way back from an insect-collecting outing in the Matroosberg.

They had more than 40 rare stag beetles — all dead — in their car.

The beetles, of the colophon genus, are a leftover from the Ice Age and are found around the world only in isolated pockets at high altitude.

Albert Rautenstrauch, his brother Günter, Wolfgang Schubert and Werner Lenz — all from Augsburg in Germany — appeared briefly in court on Friday and will go on trial in the Paarl Regional Court tomorrow on charges of illegal collection, possession and

transport of endangered insects.

After the arrest near Ceres, police went back to a guesthouse in Ladismith where several hundred of the dead beetles were found, along with scorpions and butterflies.

The four were released on R5 000 bail each by the Ceres Magistrate's Court two weeks ago, and had to hand over their passports.

Paul Gildenhuys, manager of Cape Nature Conservation's Environmental Crime Unit, said the maximum penalty for the charges was either a R100 000 fine or 10 years in prison — or both — and a fine of up to three times the trade value of the insects.

He said the beetles had a street value of up to €600 each.

Doctor Simon van Noort, a scientist at the SA Museum in Cape Town, said the colophon beetles used to be more widespread. However, as the climate warmed at the end of the last Ice Age, they moved into the mountains and

evolved into separate species. "The species is very old — hundreds of thousands of years, and there are at least 14 species in the Western Cape," he said.

"If you remove hundreds of specimens from a single place, it could well result in local extinction."

Professor Henk Geertsema of the entomology department at Stellenbosch University, said very little was known of the beetles' habits, as they burrowed underground and were found only in very specific places.

"Unfortunately, any private insect collection is not complete without a colophon. They have a high market value because of their rarity.

"The local authorities try to keep their locations secret to prevent international collectors from removing them," he said.

"They are truly endangered because as the climate becomes warmer, they cannot move any higher."



PROTECTED: Professor Henk Geertsema holds a stag beetle

Beetle scarce

DANISH police officials warn that they can attack them when they are

The head guards' union is able that me build themse in jail.

He was surprised who said st turn crimin threats.

Head of the Carsten Ped not let these within the pure madness oners are er weights of up

About 300 death" in Denmark claimed. — S

PRETORIA NEWS: 28 JANUARY 2006: p.5

Beetle poachers bitten by the bug

John Yeld
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

German cousins Albert and Günter Rautenstrauch have both been beetle collectors since childhood and both claim to "love" their subjects and study them closely, working with scientists and insect specialists.

But their scientific curiosity and emotional concern for beetles and other insects didn't stop them poaching 211 endemic *Colophon* beetles - worth an estimated R290 000 on the international collectors' market - from mountain peaks in the Western Cape's nature reserves and other areas in late December and early January.

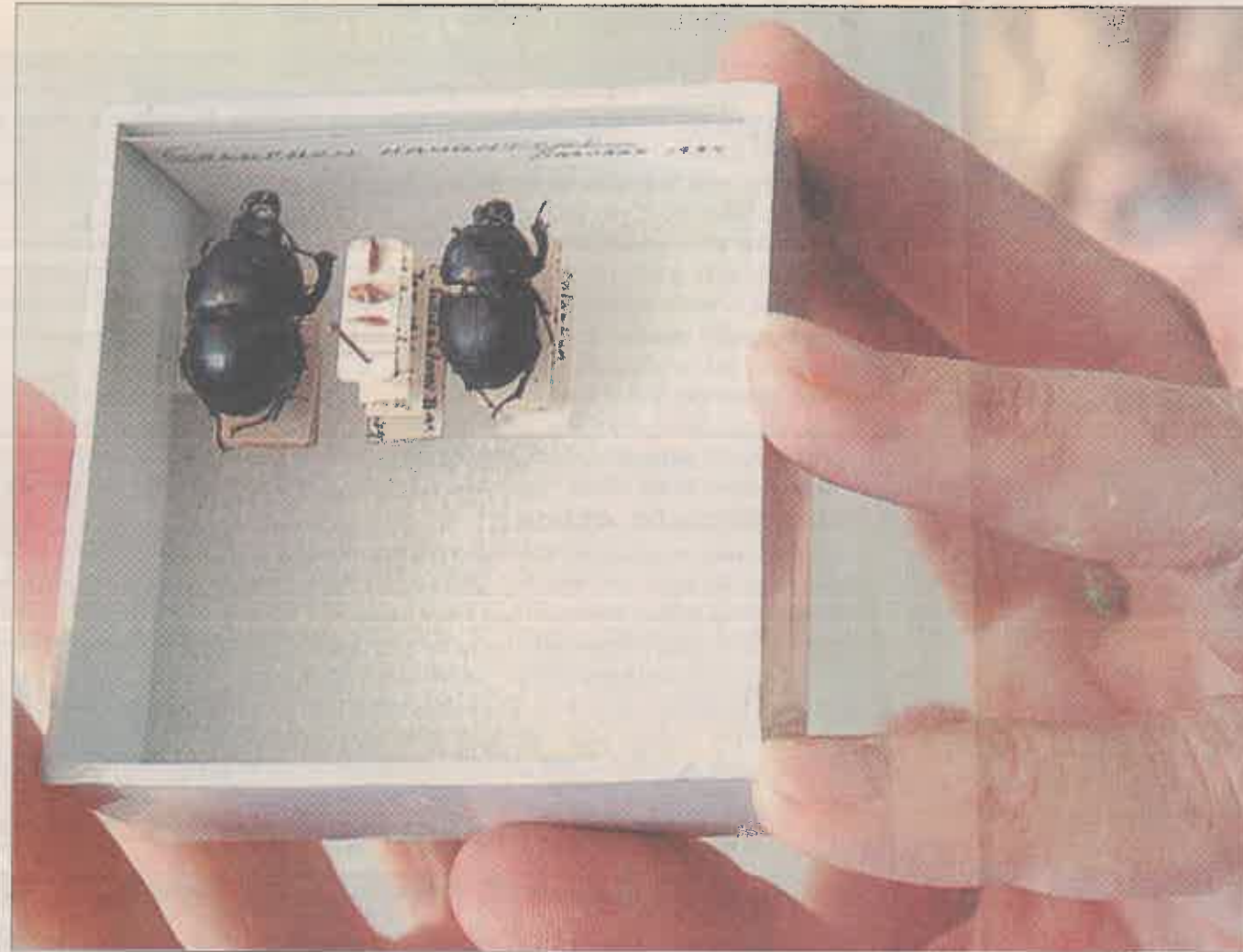
As well as the *Colophons*, they poached another 631 insects of other species - including termites, tapping beetles, bombardier beetles and snout-beetles, all dead when found by nature conservation officials - and seven live scorpions before being arrested near Ceres three weeks ago.

Yesterday, the two cousins pleaded guilty in the Paarl Regional Court to five charges under the Cape's nature conservation ordinance of hunting and/or being in possession of a total of 211 *Colophon* beetles of three species and the other insects, without the necessary permits.

The *Colophons*, also known as the Cape stag beetles and of which there are several species, are found only in the Western Cape.

Because of their rarity - the degree of rarity is still under dispute - Cape stag beetles have acquired almost "must have" status among collectors around the world and are among the most highly-priced stag beetles on the market.

The Rautenstrauchs admitted knowing that all *Colophon* species in South Africa were listed as being endangered and that it was a punishable offence to be in possession of these beetles without



Examples of the "Stag Beetle" of the *Colophon* genus on display at the SA museum in Cape Town. PICTURE: KARIN RETIEF

a permit.

They testified in their plea explanations that they had come to South Africa to collect insects and to have a holiday.

Each cousin brought a friend with them, and those two friends also each pleaded guilty yesterday in the same

court to one charge under the nature conservation ordinance.

Wolfgang Schubert, a friend of Albert Rautenstrauch who plays darts for the same club in Germany, pleaded guilty to a charge of being in possession of 12 *Colophon* beetle carcasses.

He told the court he had merely been

carrying them down the mountain for the Rautenstrauchs.

"Beetles are not protected animals in Germany or Europe as far as I am aware... I am not a collector of beetles ... I am also not interested in beetles and had no benefit in possessing them."

The second friend, Werner Lenz, said

in his plea explanation that he was a life-long friend of Günter Rautenstrauch.

Pleading guilty to one charge of helping the Rautenstrauchs collect *Colophon* beetles, he said he had accompanied them into the mountains of the Western Cape.

"It was only a few beetles (that I collected) as I was more interested in the environment and the beautiful scenery.

"By accompanying them and assisting them I was able to see some beautiful scenic places in the mountains that I would otherwise never have been able to see."

The Rautenstrauchs - who have a butterfly species named after them - both said they believed there must be "tens of thousands" of *Colophon* beetles and different sub-species, "because they are found in different places on Western Cape mountains".

"I would not be able to collect 50 *Colophon* beetles in one or two hours if there were not large numbers of them in existence," they each said in their plea explanations.

The guilty pleas were all accepted by magistrate Annemarie Immelman and the four men were convicted.

Paul Gildenhuys, manager of the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board's environmental crimes unit, testified in aggravation of sentence that he had done an Internet search and found four websites offering for sale the three *Colophon* beetle species poached by the Germans.

Taking an average price - prices varied for the different species and genders, from a low of 117 euros to highs of 600 euros and US\$920 - he worked out that just the commercial value of the *Colophon* beetles poached by the men was R290 108.

The sentence for convictions under the nature conservation ordinance can be a fine and/or a jail term and an additional fine of up to three times the commercial value of the species poached.



Hierdie kewers is soortgelyk aan dié wat in die Paarlse hofsaak ter sprake is.

Foto: JO-ANNE CAVANAGH

Buitelanders in SA in sop oor kewers

Hulle jag bedreigde goggas in natuurresewaat

Jackie Pienaar

Paarl. – Twee neefs van Duitsland het hier in die streekhof skuld beken op vyf aanklagte wat verband hou met die jag en versameling van bedreigde grootkaak-kewers (*Colophon*-genus) en ander insekte in die Wes-Kaap, asook die jag van dié kewers in 'n natuurresewaat.

Dit is die eerste saak in sy soort in Suid-Afrika. Die polisie en beamptes van die Kaapse natuurbewaringsafdeling het Albert en Günter Karl Rautenstrauch en nog twee Duitsers op 9 Januarie in die Ceres-distrik aangekeer.

Die Rautenstrauchs het in hul pleitverduideliking gesê hulle versamel al van jongs af kewers en insekte in Duitsland, ruil dit uit met ander versamelaars, verskaf dit aan wetenskaplikes en skenk dit aan museums. Albei het 'n groot versameling insekte, kewers, spinnekoppe en skerpioene. Hulle is medeskrywers van 'n boek oor die Carabus-kewer van Europa en Noord-Afrika.

Die besit van of handel in geeneen van die betrokke insekte word in Duitsland of enige ander plek ter wêreld verbied nie, het hulle aangevoer.

Albei Rautenstrauchs het skuld beken op twee aanklagte van die jag en besit van grootkaak-kewers, twee

aanklagte van die besit van insekte sonder die nodige dokumente en 'n aanklag van die jag van grootkaak-kewers in die Swartberg-natuurresewaat in Oudtshoorn.

Hulle het 211 grootkaak-kewers in hul besit gehad.

Hul medebeskuiddiges, Werner Johann Lenz en Wolfgang Schubert, het aangevoer hulle was in Suid-Afrika op vakansie. Albei het op 'n klag skuld beken.

Lenz het gesê hy het die Rautenstrauchs soms gehelp om Colophon-kewers te jag. Schubert het erken hy het 12 grootkaak-kewers sonder 'n permit by hom gehad.

Al vier beskuiddiges is van Augsburg, Duitsland.

Mnr. Paul Gildenhuys van die Wes-Kaapse natuurbewaringsraad het getuig omgewingsmisdade is naas dwelmhandel die winsgewendste misdaad wêreldwyd.

Volgens hom het die beskuiddiges goed voorbereid na Suid-Afrika gekom.

Die kewers kom voor in aanhangsel 3 van die internasionale Cites-konvensie, wat beteken dat alle handel daarin wêreldwyd gereguleer word en dit word as bedreig aangeteken deur die Wêreldnatuurlewevereniging.

Gildenhuys het die waarde van die grootkaak-kewers op R290 000 gestel.

Die verhoor is tot Dinsdag uitgestel vir vonnis.

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".