

## The Trouble with Tusks

Millions of wild elephants once roamed the continents of Africa and Asia. But elephant populations have declined by more than 50 per cent in the past century. As few as half a million elephants remain in the wild.

One of the biggest reasons for this is the killing of elephants for their ivory tusks. Ivory has been used by people for thousands of years. It is used to make piano keys, billiard balls, fancy chopsticks, Asian stamps, and other luxury trinkets. But the **only** way to get ivory is from a dead elephant.

By the 1980s, scientists believed that the killing of elephants for their ivory was putting the survival of the elephant species at risk. So, the international trade in elephant ivory was banned following an agreement among governments in 1989.

Unfortunately, elephants are still **poached** because of the high demand for ivory, the lack of protected habitat, and weak law enforcement in many poor countries.

During the first few months of 2011, at least 50 elephants were killed just for their ivory in Chad, a country in West Africa. Due to poaching, the number of elephants in Chad has dropped by more than 37% in recent years, from 4,000 in 2006 to 2,500 elephants counted in 2010.

Conservation and animal welfare organizations are working on many fronts to protect elephants from poachers. They work with governments to enforce the ivory trade ban, train and equip anti-poaching rangers, and raise public awareness to reduce demand for ivory products.

DNA research is one of the newest weapons in the fight to end

## Ivory and the Law

In 1989, a treaty called the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) gave all wild elephants the highest level of international legal protection. This effectively banned all international sales of African and Asian elephant parts, including trade in ivory, leather, skin, meat, and hair.

However, a 1997 change allowed **stockpiles** of ivory from four African nations to be sold. The ivory supposedly came from elephants that had died of natural causes, but many suspect that they had been victims of culling. A second sale of stockpiled ivory took place in 2008.

Selling stockpiled ivory deeply concerns conservationists, who are convinced that it creates the

elephant poaching. Scientists are now able to examine illegal ivory that has been seized to find out where it is coming from. They compare the ivory with DNA samples from different populations of African elephants to identify areas of high poaching activity and popular



A villager in Africa carries a large tusk of poached elephant ivory on his shoulder.

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chance for poachers to smuggle illegal ivory into legal markets.

It's impossible for people to tell the difference between legal and illegal ivory. Conservation groups like IFAW believe the trade in ivory must be completely stopped for African and Asian elephants to survive, because legal trade increases demand for ivory, which encourages more illegal poaching.

**smuggling** routes. The information makes it possible to focus anti-poaching patrols and money where they're needed most. And the countries where poaching is most common are being pressured to do more to stop the killings.

## Internet Trading

The Internet has become an easy place for illegal wildlife trade. Recent IFAW investigations have revealed a shocking amount of illegal online trade in wildlife and wildlife products. IFAW discovered that close to three-quarters of wildlife products offered online in 11 countries were made from real elephant ivory, like the trinkets pictured here. As a result of these findings, the Internet auction site eBay banned the sale of ivory at the start of 2010—proof that businesses can join the effort to save elephants. Individuals can help as well, through their choices about what to buy and not buy.





## Saving Elephants

If the ivory trade is allowed to flourish and habitat continues to decline, elephants will continue to be in serious danger. Conservation groups argue for a **holistic** approach to saving elephants. They support proactive activities—actions that work to address problems before they become too large.

Governments, organizations, businesses, and communities must work together to safeguard elephant

habitats, reduce human-elephant conflicts, stop the ivory trade, and protect elephants from poachers. Like tigers and other species, elephants are flagships for conservation: protecting elephants means that wider biodiversity and ecosystems will also be conserved.

The extinction of elephants would be a catastrophe for many other species and a tragic loss of one of the wisest and most beloved of all animals.

This African elephant mother and calf roam at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Amboseli National Park, Kenya, where IFAW works with renowned elephant scientist Cynthia Moss. Moss has followed these elephants since 1972. Her findings have provided incredible insights into elephant society, intelligence, and ecology. IFAW also supports community conservation projects with local Masai groups and partners with the Kenya Wildlife Service on anti-poaching efforts.

