

Ivory Trade Restrictions and Elephant Population

In 1979 Africa had more than 1.3 million elephants. Today the population is approximately 415,000¹. Nearly a 70% decline in less than 40 years – almost completely due to ivory poaching. So you would think the sale of ivory would be completely illegal worldwide, right? Actually it depends on the country you're in.

Timeline

- 1979** More than 1.3 million elephants are roaming Africa.
- 1980's** Poachers kill approximately 200 elephants a day.
- 1988** African elephant population plummets to around 625,000 (50% decline in 10 years).
- 1989** CITES² lists all African elephants³ in Appendix I⁴ and bans all commercial international elephant ivory trade.⁵
- 1990's** After the 1989 ban, poaching slows to manageable levels.
- 1999** CITES allows Japan to legally buy almost 50 tons of stock-piled ivory in the 1st one-off sale.⁶
- 2000** After first one-off sale, EIA⁷ exposes how legal trade is used to launder illegal ivory and 90% of ivory sold in China came from illegal sources.⁸ EIA cautions any future one-off sales.
- 2002** China itself blames the one-off sale for increasing the illegal ivory smuggled to their shores.
- 2008** CITES allows China & Japan to legally buy 102 tons of stock-piled ivory in the 2nd one-off sale.⁶
- 2012** Immediately after the sale, China held on to most of its legal ivory, stimulating local demand and raising prices, thus increasing illegal ivory trade. After 4 years, poaching is now catastrophic as a result with 100,000 elephants slaughtered between 2010 and 2012.
- 2014** 25,000 forest elephants poached in last decade in Gabon's Minkébé National Park (80% decline).⁹ 144,000 savannah elephants poached in last 7 years across Africa (30% decline).¹⁰ Price of raw (unprocessed) ivory in China reaches peak of US\$2,100 per kilogram.¹¹

¹ The population covers 37 countries (called "range states") in sub-Saharan Africa.

² CITES – Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife Fauna and Flora

³ Asian elephants were put on Appendix 1 on July 1, 1975 and commercial international sale of their ivory has been banned since then.

⁴ Appendix I – the highest level of protection meaning a ban on all international sale and trade.

⁵ Need to clarify the inclusion of trade in antique ivory (before 1947); pre-Convention ivory (before 1976); and pre-ban ivory (before 1990). Also, since 1989 the populations of Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa have been transferred back to Appendix II, but their ivory is still in Appendix I, so still included in ban.

⁶ Cites.org, *Ivory auctions raise 15 million USD for elephant conservation*, (2008). Retrieved from https://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2008/081107_ivory.shtml

⁷ EIA - Environmental Investigation Agency

⁸ Advocates of total ivory bans believe legal domestic ivory markets perpetuate illegal international trade because older, pre-ban ivory cannot easily be distinguished from poached ivory.

⁹ V Morell, *No place is safe for Africa's hunted forest elephants*, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/02/no-place-safe-africa-s-hunted-forest-elephants>

¹⁰ MJ Chase, S Schlossberg, CR Griffin, PJC Bouché, SW Djene, PW Elkan, S Ferreira, F Grossman, EM Kohi, K Landen, P Omondi, A Peltier, SAJ Selier, R Sutcliffe, *Continent-wide survey reveals massive decline in African savannah elephants*, (2016). Retrieved from <https://peerj.com/articles/2354/> The findings of this report, dubbed The Great Elephant Census, were announced at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress.

- 2015** China and the US announce an agreement to a “nearly complete ban” on ivory import/export and commercial domestic ivory trade¹² in both countries (no completion date given). Tanzania, one of the most important countries for elephants, lost 60% of their elephants in just 5 years.
- 2016** **January:** Hong Kong pledges to a complete ban on commercial domestic ivory trade by 2021.
June: US passes new regulations that ban almost all domestic ivory trade.
September: IUCN¹³ World Conservation Congress results in international commitment to close domestic ivory markets. Four countries object - Canada, Namibia, South Africa & Japan.
October: CITES conference in Johannesburg fails to put all elephant populations in Appendix I by only 9 votes - Canada, US, UK, EU and others vote against it. However, Botswana, with the most elephants, reverses their pro-ivory trade policy and supports a total ban.
- 2017** **January:** Price of raw ivory in China falls to US\$730 per kilogram (65% drop in less 3 years) due to Chinese economic slowdown, anti-poaching team success and crackdown on corruption.
February: Draft EU guidance document indicates possible ban on raw ivory re-exports by July 1, 2017 to make sure that illegal tusks are not laundered with legal tusks.
March: China closes the first of its 67 licensed ivory carving factories and retailers, and promises to close its domestic ivory market by end of 2017.
March: Hong Kong says a bill on ivory trade will be introduced by end June. Hong Kong also convicts 2 people for illegal ivory possession, using radiocarbon dating to prove post-1990 ban.
May: EU announces it will suspend re-exports of raw ivory from July 1, 2017 even if it qualifies as “pre-Convention” ivory. EU recommends tougher scrutiny of worked ivory movement.
May: Japan revises its wildlife trade legislation - the Law for Conservation of Endangered Species – to tighten the registration of ivory businesses.¹²
May: EU Commission closes a potential loophole by issuing new guidance to block the export of raw ivory as outlined in its Action Plan Against Wildlife Trafficking made in 2016.¹³
June: Tokyo Police seizes 18 ivory tusks at an antiques store, indicating Japan’s weak domestic ivory trade legislation.¹⁴
November: 29 member countries of the African Elephant Coalition call to end all trade in elephant ivory, highlighting the EU and Japan as playing active roles in the ivory trade.¹⁵

¹¹ L Vigne, E Martin, *China Faces A Conservation Challenge: The Expanding Elephant and Mammoth Ivory Trade in Beijing and Shanghai*, (2014). Retrieved from http://savetheelephants.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2014_ChinaConservationChallenge.pdf

¹² traffic.org, *TRAFFIC surveys find thousands of ivory items sold weekly online in Japan*, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.traffic.org/publications/reports/traffic-surveys-find-thousands-of-ivory-items-sold-weekly-online-in-japan/>

¹³ europa.eu, *Commission introduces new measures to fight poaching and to end trade in raw ivory*, (2017). Retrieved from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1308_en.htm

¹⁴ traffic.org, *Ivory seizure exposes Japan’s lax ivory trade controls*, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.traffic.org/news/ivory-seizure-exposes-japans-lax-domestic-ivory-trade-controls/>

¹⁵ JT Steinmetz, *African nations urged to end all trade in elephant ivory*, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.eturbonews.com/171538/african-nations-urged-end-trade-ivory>

2018 January: Hong Kong closes a loophole in their ivory ban by outlawing all sales.

April: UK announces a blanket ban on ivory trade and closes a loophole which allows the sale of antique ivory items.

April: Taiwan announces it will close its domestic ivory trade market by 2020.¹⁶

May: UK introduces its Ivory Bill to Parliament. It is said to be the toughest domestic ivory trade ban in Europe and one of the toughest in the world.¹⁷

August: The Jane Goodall Institute NZ calls on Minister of Conservation to ban domestic ivory trade.¹⁸

September: An Australian bipartisan parliamentary committee recommends a national ban on the domestic trade of elephant ivory and rhino horn.¹⁹

September: An aerial survey by Elephants Without Borders reveals at least 87 elephant carcasses in Botswana. Government officials refute the claim of an increase in poaching.²⁰

October: China lifts its 25-year-ban on the trade of tiger bones and rhino horns.²¹

November: EU backtracks on a total ivory ban in Europe, despite it being the largest domestic market for ivory products in the world.²²

¹⁶ traffic.org, *Taiwan moves to close its domestic ivory market by 2020*, (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.traffic.org/news/taiwan-announces-move-to-close-its-domestic-ivory-market-by-2020/>

¹⁷ eia-international.org, *UK Gov't publishes its Bill to shut down the country's domestic trade in ivory*, (2018). Retrieved from <https://eia-international.org/uk-govt-publishes-bill-shut-countrys-domestic-trade-ivory/>

¹⁸ janegoodall.org.nz, *Killing the New Zealand Trade in Ivory*, (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.janegoodall.org.nz/press-room-1/>

¹⁹ theguardian.com, *Bipartisan inquiry recommends Australia ban domestic ivory trade*, (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/sep/19/bipartisan-inquiry-recommends-australia-ban-domestic-ivory-trade>

²⁰ theguardian.com, *Botswana rejects claims of elephant poaching surge*, (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/20/botswana-rejects-claims-of-elephant-poaching-surge>

²¹ ft.com, *China lifts ban on trade of tiger bones and rhino horns*, (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/233edade-dbf1-11e8-9f04-38d397e6661c>

²² independent.co.uk, *EU backtracks on total ivory ban despite massive pressure from campaigners and MEPs*, (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/environment/eu-ivory-ban-elephants-poaching-wildlife-trafficking-catherine-bearder-avaaz-a8622471.html>