

Ivory Trade Restrictions and a Diminishing 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
- 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.

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, \(2008\)](https://www.cites.org/eng/news/pr/2008/081107_ivory.shtml). 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.

Note: All following footnotes contain source information only and are listed at the end of this document.

- 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 seize 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
- 2018** **January:** Hong Kong closes a loophole in their ivory ban by outlawing all sales.
- April:** UK announces blanket ban on ivory trade, closing a loophole allowing antique ivory sales.
- 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:** Jane Goodall Institute NZ calls on Conservation Minister 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

2019 **January:** Botswana's new president reverses the country's earlier stance to stop ivory sales and joins Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe in asking CITES to open up their ivory markets.²³

January: A report by international NGOs on Hong Kong's sizeable illegal wildlife trade, labels Macau as Hong Kong's major elephant tusk ivory trade port.²⁴

February: Elephants Without Borders claims the level of poaching in Botswana to be "unprecedented" after nearly 90 elephant carcasses were found during their aerial survey.²⁵

March: Kenya appeals to the EU to close its domestic market and end trophy imports in order to halt a decline in elephant population. The EU has the largest number of ivory traders.²⁶

March: China's ban on domestic ivory sales and ivory carving factories will not be enough to save the world's elephants if it does not address its booming illegal ivory trade.²⁷

May: Conservationists outraged at Botswana's decision to lift its 5-year elephant hunting ban.²⁸

May: Minnesota becomes 10th US state to prohibit ivory sales by law.²⁹ Other US states with similar laws are: New Jersey (August 2014), New York (June 2015), California (July 2016), Washington (January 2017), Oregon (May 2017), Hawaii (June 2017), Nevada (January 2018), Illinois (August 2018) and New Hampshire (January 2019).³⁰

July: Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, hosting 60% of Africa's elephants, want CITES to approve sale of their government ivory stocks and elephant hunting trophies.³¹

August: Singapore will ban domestic ivory sales from September 2021, removing a key market. In December 2018, a poll showed 99% of its residents supported the ban.³²

August: Israel announces closure of its domestic ivory market in elephant and mammoth ivory, and Australia announces its intent to close its market.³³

August: Different approaches to protecting elephants are set to dominate the debate at CITES CoP18 from August 17-28 with over 180 countries attending.³⁴

August: A coalition of 30 African elephant range states criticised Japan and EU's failure to close their domestic ivory markets as recommended at last CITES. Countries that have not banned their trade by next CITES must report back on the measures they are taking to do so.³⁵

September: CITES publishes an updated list of the decisions made on the proposals that took place at CITES CoP18 in Geneva.³⁶

September: NZ government releases a discussion document for public consultation, detailing options to regulate its domestic market for elephant ivory.³⁷

October: An op-ed by Zimbabwe Wildlife Department's head of research on his belief the CITES treaty structure is flawed, causing 9 Southern African nations to debate their membership.³⁸

November: Antique dealers in the UK fail in an attempt to overturn the world's toughest ban on ivory trading. The UK high court rules the legislation does not breach European law.³⁹

December: Minnesota makes it illegal to trade in elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns within the state's borders as of January 1, 2020.⁴⁰

2020 **January:** China, the world's largest market for wildlife products, announces an immediate temporary ban on the sale of wildlife in markets, restaurants and online as part of an effort to contain the Coronavirus outbreak.⁴¹

February: Botswana auctions the trophy hunting of 60 elephants to locals, ending a 5-year ban. A total of 272 elephants will be trophy hunted this year.⁴²

February: China permanently bans wildlife trade and consumption, but not the use of wildlife for fur, medicine or research. This creates a loophole for illegal trafficking of wildlife.⁴³

Appendices (from #9 onwards)

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