

# Report on elephant poaching

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The history of poaching may be as old as that of the human beings involved in the practice. Initially invented in the form of hunting as a source of food for humans millions of years ago, this act was practiced by several communities. This is because hunted animals could easily be turned into meals compared to other sources of food. It is this act of domestic hunting that progressively developed into poaching; which is an illegal act and which is majorly aimed at financial gains to those who carry it out. Most cases that are graded as poaching are done out of season, on restricted land, during illegal hours, by use of illegal weapons, and without a permit to kill animals or take away plants.

According to Moss, Large scale elephant poaching must have started in African regions in the 1970s (52). Specifically referring to Kenya, Moss asserts that poaching of elephants in Amboseli Park reduced the populations of elephants radically with several armed poachers originating from other parts of the country and even other countries (52). According to Santiapillai and Peter (6), poaching also poses a major threat to the lives of elephants in Asia. They also list the 1970s and 1980s as the worst period for the onset of large scale elephant poaching in Asia. In Thailand for example, more than 10% of elephants in controlled areas were poached in a span of three years; between 1975 and 1979 (71). This amounted to a population of about 100 elephants. A similar case was experienced in India where international trade on ivory and other products of elephants had been banned by 1976 (32). Conservation for Development Centre also notes that elephants located in Luangwa Valley of Zambia reduced from a population of over 8000 to less than 200 between 1975 and 1987 (32). Of the county's close to 87000

elephants, surviving population is only slightly above 25000 (32). Generally, poaching has a long history. However, poaching of elephants saw a radical increase as from the early 1970s and has continued to be a threat to the survival of the elephants as poachers have improved tact and upgraded their weapons with time.

Though the mostly targeted part of the elephant is ivory, there are some cases when elephants are still killed for other purposes. Such may include the skins, meat, and even shipment of living elephants for sale in other locations. Japan has the leading market for elephant ivory (Barbier 60). Other notable countries with large markets include the United States, China, and Thailand, a number of European countries as well as African countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Barbier 60). It is important to note that black or illegal market for ivory and other products may be relatively large and may not be accounted for. Though there is no specified season when ivory is sold, various countries have laws that relate to purchases, ownership and sale of ivory. Because ivory trade is banned in most African and Asian countries, restrictions apply to ivory bought after the legislations were introduced. All Asian ivory that was imported after the year 1976, and whose age is not more than one hundred years is considered illegal (Santiapillai and Peter 7). A similar case applies to African ivory that was imported or exported after 1989.

The specific reason why many poachers get more interested in poaching elephants compared to other animals is to obtain ivory from the elephant task. Ivory is quite expensive because of its uses. Firstly, ivory's texture is close-grained; this makes its structure compact with very high density. As

such, it is preferred by workers of art since it is durable. Ivory is also adhesively hard with a very smooth outline and an attractive color. Because of these qualities, ivory is used in carving of objects and construction of veneer sheets for various purposes. (Stern 334-337). Other uses include the production of billiard balls, decorative objects and parts of musical instruments like piano. Modern technology uses ivory in partial manufacture of electric plane parts and several other electric appliances (Stern 334-337). Because of its high value, the price of ivory remains quite high, as of 2007, the price of ivory was more than US \$850 per kilogram. It is because of this that poachers target elephants as they are the main source of ivory material.

There are several dangers associated to poaching of elephants. According to Barbier, the rate of decline in elephant population in the 1970s and 1980s due to poaching would possibly lead to the extinction of elephants if unchecked (3). Such propositions can easily be supported by the fact that some African countries like Nigeria had the last traces of elephants in the 1990s. Eliminating the elephants from their natural habitat further affects the ecological balance in the habitat, getting rid of the role played by elephants as part of the habitat. Barbier (110) asserts that a comparative approach on ivory trade against tourism shows that tourism earns the country much more. While the highest trade on ivory has never been more than \$360 million, tourism has stayed above \$375 million for many years in Kenya. Additionally, even if this income were to surpass \$360 million by large numbers, it would mean killing all the elephants to achieve this goal. This would leave no more elephants to be killed the following year. Other

than posing danger to the elephant population, poaching affects the natural habitat and endangers the future of tourism.

Controlling the activities of poachers is one of the most difficult tasks. This is because poachers re-invent new methods and tactics that cannot be discovered by the authorities. Barbier (111) proposes that the best way to approach monitoring of poaching activities is to engage the local communities near elephant locations. He proposes that this can be done by making such communities share holders in the elephants and thus increasing their interests in such activities. The benefits of such corporations include improved efficiency in monitoring and reduced costs of patrol. The fact that some countries like Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa can still export ivory may spread to poaching in neighboring countries (Barbier 147). As such, strict legislation should be established to control such activities.

Barbier further proposes international intervention in domestic management with regard to legislations relating to ivory trade and killing of elephants (112). Other than these, the use of organized state structures, as well as, impartial application of law relating to poaching can help reduce poaching tremendously. One of the major organizations in control of poaching is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Moss 297). CITES is a multilateral treaty that was enacted to control trade on endangered species and their products. It deals with trade permit issue, certification and confirmation, warning of disobedient country members, verification of capacity to enable free or restricted trade in various species and the suspension of members among other issues. The international Anti Poaching Foundation is another organization which aims at

engaging the communities in conservation and controlling poaching. Most of these organizations work together with the wildlife units established by various governments Santiapillai and Peter (6).

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