

# Ending the ivory trade and the illegal poaching of animals

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A baby elephant and its parents walk up to a watering hole to drink. The baby stalks ahead and gets there before the parents. It turns around to see if they are coming and sees them both lying on the ground, dead. Just imagine being this baby now without a family.

This is one of the effects of the ivory trade. Elephants are going extinct and the animal kingdom is losing some of its most vital animals. Many animals are poached to become novelty items or for medicinal properties they possess. Rhinos, elephants, tigers, they all have something poachers want: monetary value. The ivory trade and black market have a lasting impact on elephants, other animals, and even the environment. Many people would come to believe that poaching animals has benefits to those living in Africa.

The poaching of lions keeps them off of properties and away from eating livestock and valuable food sources. While this is true, there could be other alternatives to keeping deadly animals away from crops and livestock without permanently harming them. For example, thirteen year old Richard Turere of Kenya has invented what he calls "Lion Lights." They are a series of solar powered lights made to look like someone is walking around. It is intended to scare lions away from the livestock.

He came up with this invention after noticing that lions hate the moving light of a flashlight. There are alternatives to keeping lions and other animals away from people besides killing them and endangering their species. The groups that illegally poach elephants and other animals make huge payouts because of it. "The Lord's Resistance Army in Central Africa have been tied to ivory smuggling as a means to raise funding for arms and operations."

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Many groups pay for more weapons and use the funds for this illegal operation.

Today, the average price of ivory has risen to \$973 per pound. This price, even though a 1989 ban reduced the price to \$5 a pound. The “white gold” from elephants makes poachers fortunes and money that they just use to harm more animals. Elephant species around Africa and Asia have entered the endangered species list. These include the Sumatran, Asian, Borneo Pygmy, Indian, Sri Lankan, and African elephant species according to the World Wildlife fund (WWF). The amount of elephants in the world today has drastically dropped.

Currently, there are approximately 415, 000 elephants walking the planet with 35, 000 killed annually in Africa. Bloodyivory explains how, “In 1979 there were 1.3 million African elephants. A decade later, widespread poaching had reduced that figure by more than half.” Poaching has brought elephants species to near extinction.

Elephant herds are suffering and so is the ecosystem because of the ivory trade and black market’s attempts at making people money. Jack Hanna’s Into the Wild, a show on PBS went into the grasslands of Tanzania where they observed the actions of an elephant herd and the effects of each gender on the herd. An interview with Doctor Charles Foley examined the impact of the female gender on the herd. Foley explains how poachers begin by shooting the males and then moves onto the older females with large tusks. After shooting the females, the birth rates of the herd are lowered.

No elephants being born can lead to the extinction, or near extinction, of the species. Also many groups are split up after poachings making it easier for infants to get out on their own and lost or killed by bigger stronger animals (Foley). The loss of both female and infant elephants makes it very hard to repopulate the herds. Another reason the illegal poaching of elephants is harmful is because of the impact elephants have on the ecosystem.

Elephants are responsible for the dispersal and germination of native plant seeds.

They step on the seeds, driving them into the soil where they can grow and produce food for the animals. Over 30% of central African tree species require elephants to reproduce (WWF). The ecosystem requires elephants to keep the environment running. Without the impact elephants have on the ecosystem, much of central Africa would lose vital plant species. This could lead to desertification or even deforestation of Africa's bushlands and forests.

Many other species besides elephants are being hunted and poached. Many rhinos are hunted daily for their skin or even horns, which are know throughout Africa and Asia for their medicinal properties. The Javan Rhino, present in India and south Asia is being poached at an irreplaceable rate. Widespread poaching has caused the removal of its species; there are currently 60 Javan Rhinos living on the island of Sumatra (WWF). Excessive poaching of this species has caused them to become critically endangered. The few remaining are their species' only hope at surviving.

World Wildlife continues by explaining that low genetic diversity in the species has made it near impossible to revitalize their numbers. Animals are killed daily for their monetary value: elephants for their tusks, tigers for their skin, rhinos for their horns. The illegal ivory trade is devastating elephant populations and is possibly the most devastating conservation crisis in a while. They are hunted down and taken from their families because of the “white gold” they possess. Many don’t know that elephants help the ecosystem and without them, many plants, especially trees, won’t grow. Elephants and many other animals are going extinct and the only way to stop this widespread poaching is to put an end to the ivory trade.