

# Elephants

A WCS Progress Report

2015



# We Stand for Wildlife.<sup>SM</sup>

**By the year 2020, earth's wildlife will share the planet with 7.6 billion people. In the face of mounting pressures, we all share a responsibility to protect the wild species and places on which all lives depend.**

**Our goal is to conserve the world's largest wild places in 15 priority regions, home to more than 50 percent of the world's biodiversity. We have a new strategy and a new look. Our logo—a stylized W—stands for wildlife.**

**We cannot do this work alone. We need a collective approach that meets the scale of the challenge. We need you, our supporters, to join us, unified by a shared promise to save wildlife.**



One of the world's most emblematic species, the majestic elephant, is fighting for its very survival. Caught in the crosshairs of intense poaching and habitat loss, both African and Asian elephants are disappearing across their ranges. With them, we are losing their ecological, economic, and cultural value. Protecting this keystone species means we also conserve vast swaths of habitat, and in doing so, ensure the safety of countless other species.

**This WCS Progress Report provides our generous supporters with select updates and insights on our recent conservation activities to protect elephants.**



WCS AND OUR PARTNERS PERFORM AERIAL SURVEYS TO CONDUCT ELEPHANT COUNTS.

## Elephant Counts in Africa Show Mixed Results

WCS's long-term commitment to conserving elephants includes the ongoing monitoring of their populations. We do this as part of our continuous efforts to identify key habitats and assess their population trends, trace herd movements, and pinpoint poaching threats. One vital tool is elephant surveys, which help identify trends and devise corresponding conservation initiatives. Over the past few years, WCS has coordinated African forest elephant surveys that resulted in a groundbreaking publication in 2013 showing a 62 percent decline in numbers between 2002 and 2011. Since 2014, WCS has been leading savannah elephant counts in a number of countries as part of a collaborative effort called the Great Elephant Census®, a Paul G. Allen project. The results have been mixed, with both population increases and decreases identified. However, all of these counts have given us and our partners valuable insights into the current status of elephants throughout Africa's savannahs and informed where we should concentrate efforts.

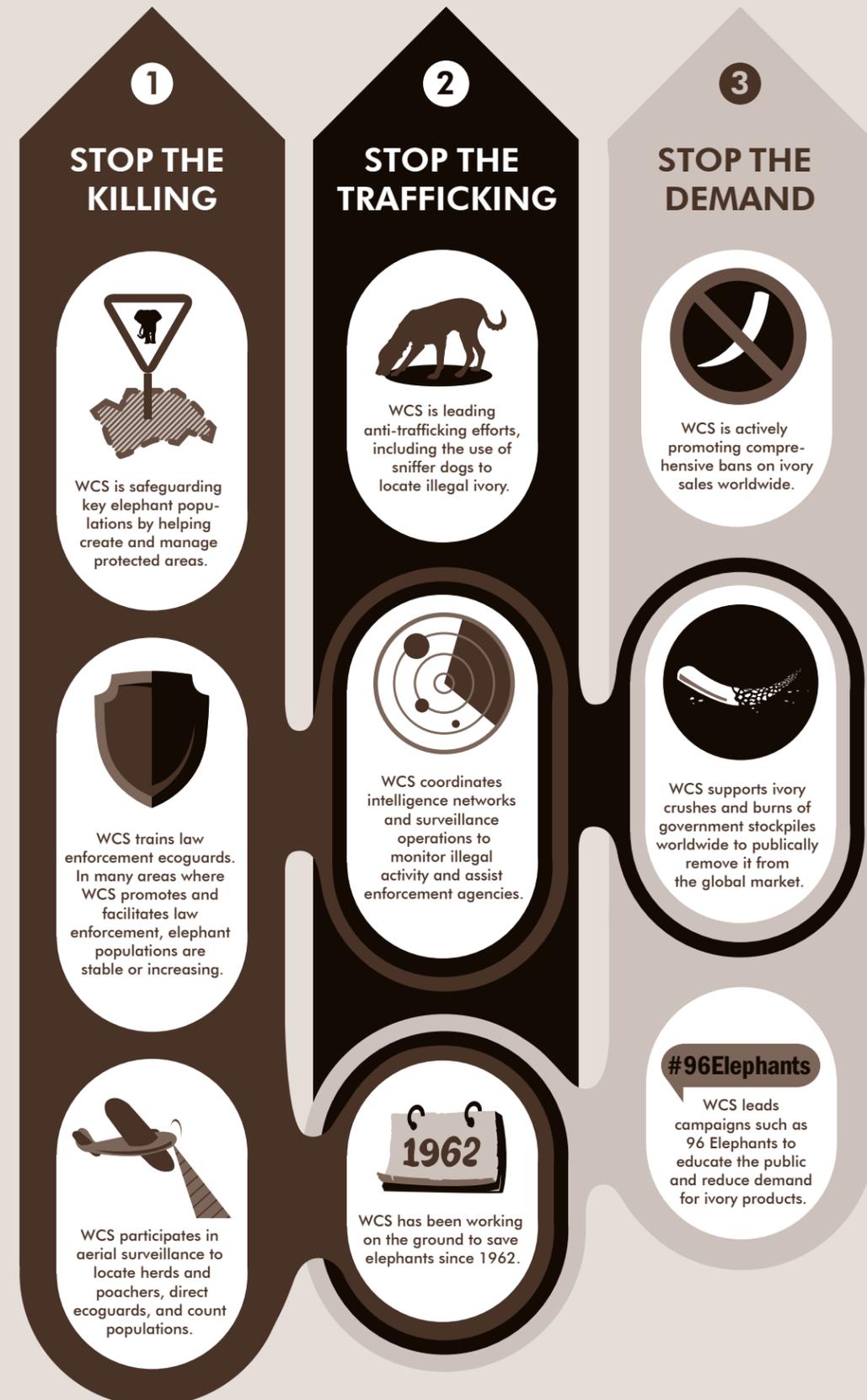
Aerial surveys of elephant populations in Uganda's national parks have shown that their numbers are increasing. Recent results indicate that elephant numbers in the country have risen to more than 5,000 individuals, up from approximately 700 to 800 individuals in the 1970s and 1980s. WCS attributes this promising rise

to improved protection, strong Ugandan government leadership, and other focused conservation efforts. In order to help maintain and feasibly grow these numbers, WCS will continue partnering with the government and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, strengthening field-based anti-poaching and anti-trafficking actions, and supporting the establishment of transboundary elephant protection efforts with neighboring countries.

Sadly, rampant poaching is causing severe elephant declines throughout much of Africa. In two countries where WCS conducted surveys, Tanzania and Mozambique, there have been dramatic drops in elephant numbers. Scientists are estimating a 48 percent reduction of Mozambique's elephants in the last 5 years, down from just over 20,000 to the current estimate of 10,300. The countrywide census results in Tanzania reveal an estimate of 43,330 existing elephants, compared to the 2009 census showing 109,051. This represents an astounding loss of 65,721 elephants in 5 years. The governments of both nations recognize this crisis and are taking steps to protect their elephant populations from further decline. WCS is supporting them in these efforts. WCS also leads major initiatives across Africa to stop the killing of elephants by establishing protected areas, mobilizing ranger patrols, and developing monitoring technology.

## WCS's Three-Pronged Approach

Elephants are our responsibility. WCS is leading the charge to reverse the decline and protect elephants.





## Combatting Ivory Trafficking in Uganda

Uganda has seen a slow and steady elephant recovery since the end of the nation's civil war in the late 1980s. Elephant numbers in each of Uganda's four main parks, Kibale, Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls, and Kidepo Valley, have been increasing over the last 25 years. This recovery is an encouraging sign that conservation efforts are succeeding. However, Uganda is a major transit country for ivory from other elephant populations outside the country. In 2013, Uganda was named by CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) as one of the eight countries most seriously implicated in the illegal ivory trade because of its role as a major transit nation, with large volumes of illegal ivory passing through Uganda en route to Kenya and then to the Far East.

In an effort to curb wildlife trafficking within Uganda, WCS collaborated with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) to launch an online database that allows law enforcement officials to track wildlife criminals by monitoring arrests, identifying repeat offenders and their associates, and documenting prosecutions. Since its implementation in 2014, the database has grown rapidly; it now contains information

on 1,630 arrests, 1,261 cases taken to court, and 1,150 suspects. WCS also merged its existing database with partner organization WILDLEO's records in order to develop a more comprehensive system. WCS is further enhancing the database by adding a fingerprint matching component, enabling wardens to match suspects in custody directly to their individual file; this is an extremely useful tool in the event that the suspect gives a false name. We also provided 15 computers to the UWA for implementation of this new system. As a result of this successful system, WCS's Rwanda program is developing a similar project with the Rwanda Development Board.

## Protecting Thailand's Asian Elephants

The largest population of Asian elephants in Thailand exists within in the Western Forest Complex, an expanse of 17 protected areas that cover over 18,000 square kilometers. In the heart of this region, WCS helps operate the most intensive ranger patrol network in Southeast Asia. This system of 51 patrol teams and over 300 park rangers works around the clock to protect the Huai Kha Khaeng and Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuaries, which together form an UNESCO World Heritage Site, plus the important buffer area formed by the Umpang Wildlife Sanctuary. The key philosophy of this concentrated patrol system is to create inviolate places for important wildlife, including elephants and tigers, throughout this vast, wild space. WCS activity is effectively stopping the killing of Asian elephants in this critical portion of their range.

In the last year, WCS has trained more than 100 new park rangers on the best practices for effective patrolling, including: use of GPS equipment, topographic maps, and compasses; strategic data collection; firearm handling; arrest techniques; and night time surveillance and poacher apprehension. Beyond technical training, WCS provides these ranger patrols with rations, field equipment, uniforms, and boots, all of the essentials necessary to protect the rangers and maintain their patrol operations. This vital support has led to increased ranger patrol coverage and frequency. Due to the vigilance of WCS-supported and trained patrol teams, there have been no major poaching cases within the eastern portion of Thung Yai Naresuan since 2013. And in the other neighboring wildlife sanctuaries, poaching gangs have been identified and thwarted.

WCS is also actively engaged in poaching detection and prevention through the use of hidden cameras throughout the forest. These cameras operate both day and night and are able to photograph poachers without them noticing. After identification, park managers are able to confront



the individuals and prevent them from continuing this activity. Local communities are becoming increasingly aware of these new techniques and hunters are now being deterred from participating in poaching.

As a result of WCS's strong leadership and ranger preparation, highly threatened animal populations in key areas of Thailand are stabilizing or rebounding. The current distribution of these animals is also holding steady, and in some cases, the strengthened protection is facilitating range growth. Tigers, one of the most endangered species in Asia, are on the rise in this area, increasing in both population size and distribution. This rebound also shows promise for the forest's elephants, and we are planning further studies to monitor their recovery.



## A Conversation with Dr. Fiona Maisels

Dr. Fiona Maisels is the advisor for WCS's wildlife survey and monitoring programs in Central Africa. Her expertise covers survey methodologies, wildlife abundance and distribution, wildlife ecology, and protected area management. Dr. Maisels is a member of the IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group.

### *What inspired you to study African forest elephants?*

**DR. FIONA MAISELS:** We field biologists typically start by simply enjoying the forest and appreciating its massive diversity of species. As we get to know it better, we realize that in many places there are important components that should be there, but which are either completely absent, or at densities too low for normal forest function. Elephants are a prime example. We then respond by doing something about it. As a general tropical forest ecologist, I am as excited by the whole forest community and its ecology as I am by elephants.



### *In 2013 you and Dr. Samantha Strindberg published a groundbreaking scientific paper on the decline of forest elephants, showing that they had declined by 62 percent between 2002 and 2011. How has this study guided your work over the last few years?*

**FM:** Since our study was published, we have continued to document forest mammal decline. In 2014, Sam and I ran our model again, using new data from the 2012 and 2013 surveys. The update showed a 65 percent decline from 2002 to 2013, with no change in the 9 percent annual rate of loss. Since the publication of that elephant research, we have been working on great ape data from the same surveys (2003 to 2013). We are preparing a similar paper

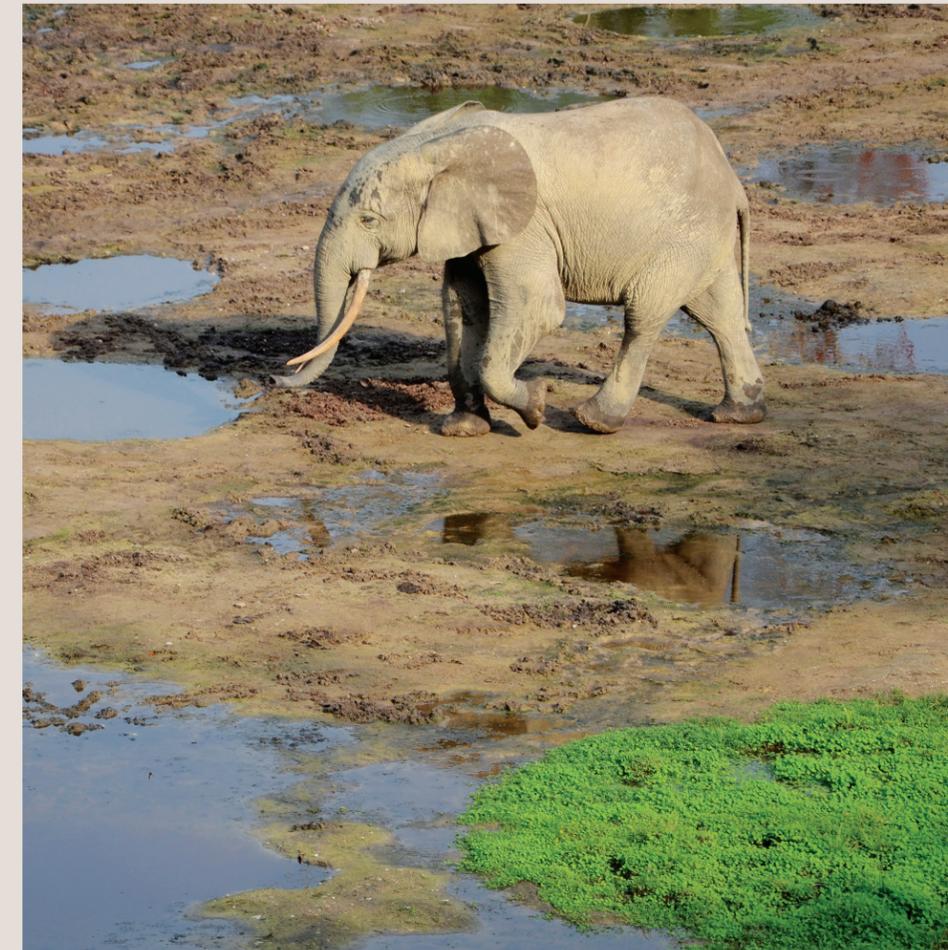
which shows distribution and population trends of western lowland gorillas and central chimpanzees in Western Equatorial Africa (between Cameroon's Sanaga River and the Congo River). After that, we would like to complete an analysis of typical ungulate "bushmeat" species (forest antelopes and wild pigs). All of these species tell us about what is happening to the forest wildlife community and, unfortunately, we're always able to explain animal distribution and abundance by human pressure.

### *Since your discovery, what changes have you seen in conservation and policy around elephants?*

**FM:** Thanks to greater international awareness about the decline of forest elephants, many governments have increased funding and training for additional protective measures, like ecoguards. Our study showed that elephant density was higher in areas where rangers were present, so patrolling has since become even more of a priority for elephant conservation. The global community is also taking action on all wildlife trafficking by strengthening policies which combat illegal wildlife trade, banning domestic ivory sales in some places, and publically destroying ivory stockpiles.

### *What is the most rewarding part of your work?*

**FM:** The most important and rewarding element of our work is making a difference in the world. Simply documenting the decline of forest species is essentially the same as being a historian; however, when the international community actually uses our information and takes action as the result of this documentation, then the impact of our work becomes extremely rewarding. So, it was particularly gratifying to see the attention our forest elephant paper received at the last CITES conference, where it was widely cited by high-level participants and significantly influenced policy to benefit elephants.



### *What do you consider to be the most successful conservation strategy for protecting elephants?*

**FM:** The ultimate solution for saving elephants depends on successful ivory demand reduction. The survival of these animals requires an immediate behavioral transformation, where people who currently consider ivory as an object of beauty and artistic merit realize that ivory removed from an elephant is a shameful object, obtained by the brutal killing of an animal as sensitive and family-oriented as humans are. If people stop buying ivory, elephants will slowly begin to recover across Africa, where there is still suitable habitat for them.

## Advancing Ivory Policy in the U.S. and Around the World

DR. CRISTIÁN SAMPER SPEAKS TO WORLD LEADERS ABOUT WILDLIFE CRIME.

With the international spotlight focused on the issue of wildlife trafficking, worldwide policies are being strengthened to stop this devastating crime, particularly on the side of illegal ivory trade. The United States and United Nations are taking a strong stance to protect elephants and other threatened wildlife species by increasing legislation and regulation, and by adopting strict policies. WCS is also working extensively with national governments in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to stop wildlife trafficking. In addition to legislation, this work includes efforts to detect and prevent wildlife crimes.

### U.S. Federal Policy

WCS is currently raising public support in the United States for the passage of federal legislation H.R. 2494, the Global Anti-Poaching Act. This bill would bolster wildlife trafficking law enforcement, including allowing the transfer of retired military equipment to wildlife rangers and strengthening the prosecution of offenders under racketeering and money laundering laws.

**The legislation would have a major impact on preventing wildlife crimes and prosecuting the criminals involved in wildlife crime by:**

1. Giving authority to the Department of Defense to provide training and equipment to African countries fighting wildlife crime.
2. Allowing violations of certain wildlife protection laws to be prosecuted with stricter penalties.
3. Supporting the professionalization of wildlife law enforcement units by creating training and accreditation standards and procedures.
4. Re-directing seizures, forfeitures, and penalties to on the ground conservation of the species affected by the wildlife crime.

### U.S. State Policy

Individual states around the U.S. are also taking major steps in stopping the ivory trade. The State of California has passed legislation banning the sale of ivory and rhino horn. Bill AB96, named after WCS's 96 Elephants campaign, effectively closes the state's commercial ivory market, one of the largest in the country. In November, Washington state voters overwhelmingly passed a ballot initiative to ban the trade of elephant and other wildlife parts.

A number of other states introduced ivory regulation bills in 2015 including Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and the District of Columbia. WCS plans to focus our support efforts in the following key states: Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, and potentially Hawaii.

### United Nations Policy

This year WCS also worked closely with a number of governments on a United Nations wildlife trafficking resolution which calls on all 193 UN Member States to take on specific actions to "prevent, combat, and eradicate the illegal trade in wildlife." Adopted by consensus, the resolution urges all governments to strengthen national legislation, address organized criminal groups participating in wildlife trafficking, and develop sustainable livelihoods for communities affected by wildlife trafficking. The issue of wildlife trafficking will now be revisited by the UN on an annual basis, beginning in September 2016.

## Ending China's Ivory Trade

On May 29, 2015, the international conservation community received game-changing news when the Chinese government announced that the country's domestic commercial trade in ivory will be phased out. Although no timeframe has been determined, this announcement is a very positive move towards reducing the illegal trade in ivory and can be seen as a culmination of local and international support from NGOs and other organizations. WCS had a leading voice in encouraging such an action to be taken and played a significant role in advising this decision. Furthermore, WCS's advocacy work in international fora such as CITES and global summits, as well as our global policy work, contributed to this announcement.

As China determines the best timeline and approach to ceasing its processing and domestic sale of ivory, WCS is assisting this process in a number of ways. In an effort to support more effective decision-making, WCS is collaborating with Chinese and international experts to model scenarios which clearly consider the benefits, risks, and costs of different approaches to implementing and managing a domestic ivory ban. This project will produce a Chinese economy cost analysis aimed at providing an additional impetus for a permanent ban of the domestic

ivory trade. WCS is working with policy makers and influential leaders in China to disseminate our findings and support rapid policymaking, which will mitigate risks, such as a possible pre-ban increase in the demand for ivory.

WCS has stepped up national public campaigns in China to continue to undermine the perceived value of ivory and increase the perceived risk of purchasing ivory. These public campaigns include collaboration with key media, art, and fashion world partners that will help our message reach a larger, yet targeted audience. Finally, WCS is helping enforcement agencies crack down on illegal sellers, especially those online, by providing training, developing technology to improve intelligence gathering, and supporting the prosecution of gang traffickers.

All of these actions are laying the groundwork for the closure of the largest ivory market in the world. According to WCS President and CEO Cristián Samper, "Shutting down the legal ivory industry in China will remove the cloak behind which the illegal trade has been hiding. Furthermore, China's statement will precipitate similar commitments from other regional consumer countries; for this reason alone, this move should be recognized for its significance."



CONFISCATED IVORY

# Destroying Ivory Around the World

A growing number of countries are opting to burn or crush their ivory stockpiles to prevent its movement back into the trade chain, to help raise awareness about the plight of elephants, and to deter would-be traffickers. In 2015 alone, eight countries—Thailand, China, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, United Arab Emirates, and the United States—have publically destroyed more than 42 tons of illegal ivory, representing approximately 3,818 elephants. As WCS President and CEO Cristián Samper has stated, “Governments, NGOs, and communities are uniting across continents to quash this crime, which threatens elephants as well as rangers and local communities.”

In April, the Republic of Congo held the first-ever Africa-wide conference to develop a continental strategy for ending wildlife trafficking. To celebrate this occasion the country burned its entire stockpile of confiscated elephant ivory. This event (coordinated and implemented by WCS in collaboration with the Government of Congo and the UK-based NGO “Stop Ivory”) not only removed the ivory from potential illegal economic use, but also sent a clear message to illegal traders and the entire international community that the country is committed

to ending the rampant elephant crisis. In addition, WCS helped the government strengthen its stockpile oversight. Officials are now managing and helping secure the country’s ivory stockpile using new tablet-based technology. With technical support from WCS, the Government of Congo submitted a National Ivory Action Plan to CITES and is now implementing this plan. WCS hopes that these steps will form a turning point in the fight against illegal ivory trafficking within the Republic of Congo.

In July, WCS supported an ivory and rhino horn burn in Mozambique, eliminating over one ton of ivory and 53 rhino horns that had recently been seized. This event underscored Mozambique’s commitment to reverse the decline of elephant populations through increased policing and strengthening partnerships. More generally, WCS and the Government of Mozambique are working hand-in-hand to combat wildlife poaching and strengthen law enforcement.

In August, Thailand destroyed more than two tons of previously confiscated ivory. WCS applauded the Thai government for this initiative and called on the country to take further action to close domestic markets by banning the purchasing, selling, importing, and exporting of ivory.



**“Governments, NGOs, and communities are uniting across continents to quash this crime, which threatens elephants as well as rangers and local communities.”**



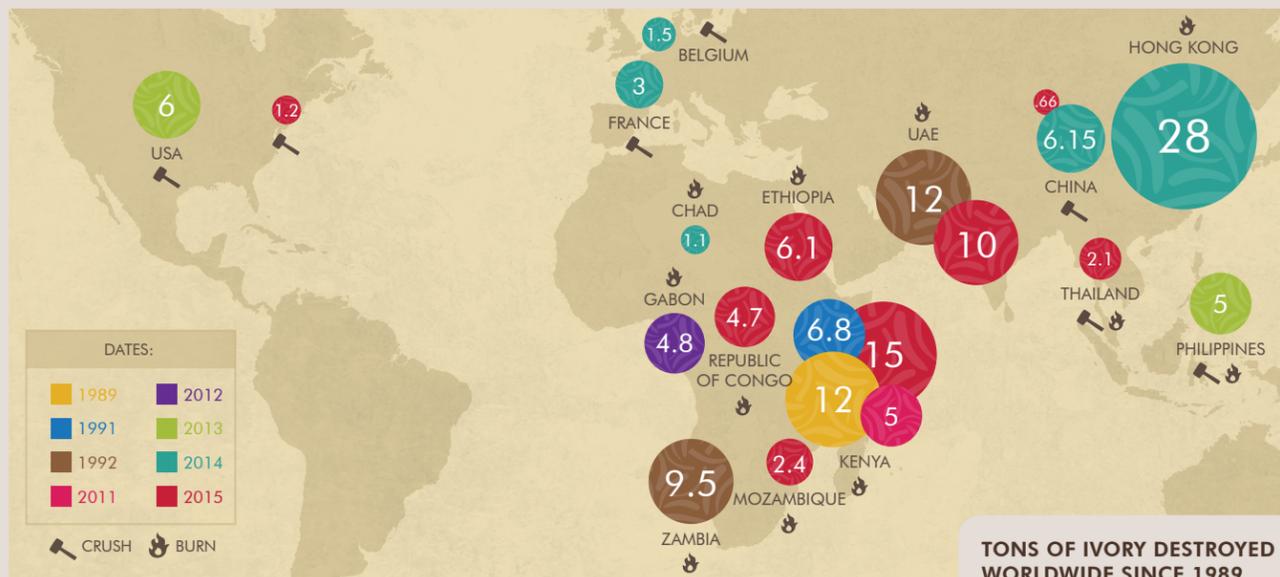
## Times Square Ivory Crush

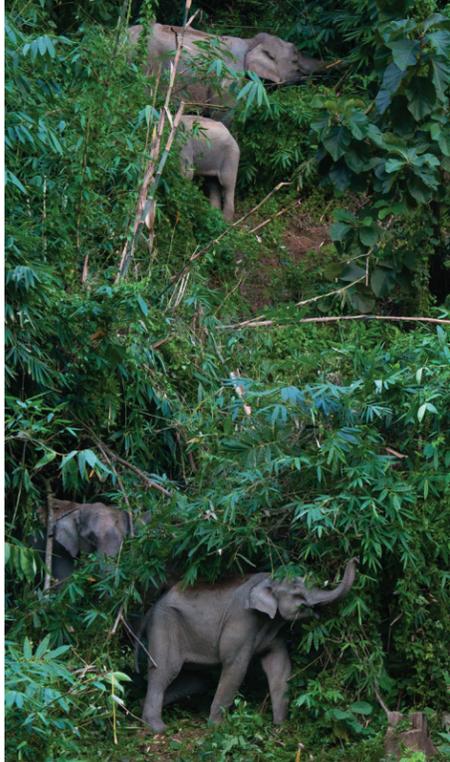
On June 19, the United States stood in solidarity with the world’s elephants and other nations around the world to demonstrate our unified effort to end wildlife crime. The crushing of ivory in the internationally recognized location of Times Square signified the United States’ commitment to global efforts to dismantle the criminal networks responsible for much of the illegal wildlife trade, which can no longer be tolerated as it decimates vulnerable species across the globe.

At the event, the United States destroyed more than one ton of illegal ivory confiscated through the government’s law enforcement efforts. Ivory tusks, trinkets, statues, jewelry, and other decorative items were crushed as thousands of supporters

gathered to watch and cheer. Equally important were the lasting impressions made on millions of people beyond New York City; the crush generated hundreds of stories in media outlets from 26 countries around the globe.

Until the State of New York’s ivory ban passed in 2014, New York City functioned as the nation’s largest ivory market. With additional state ivory bans and federal policies in development, the United States is moving toward even stricter restrictions on the sale of ivory. As Dr. Cristián Samper stated, “We are not just crushing illegally poached ivory, we are crushing the bloody ivory market.”





## Major Ivory Trader Arrested in Indonesia

## Predicting Human-Elephant Conflicts Before They Occur

In India, WCS has always been at the forefront of advanced wildlife surveying methods, and today continues to devise better ways to locate, count, and protect India's remaining elephant populations. Earlier this year WCS published a breakthrough report, which established a reliable approach to predicting when and where human-wildlife conflicts are likely to occur. This research has important implications in India, where over 400 people and 100 elephants are killed in conflicts annually.

The study, led by WCS scientist Dr. Varun Goswami, was the result of an intensive seven-year analysis of human-elephant conflicts in northeast India using cutting-edge methodology to better understand the reported conflicts. The scientists integrated a combination of citizen science—local reporting of conflict events—and occupancy modeling to analyze the drivers of human-elephant conflict. Elephant consumption of crops was the primary cause of conflict; the researchers investigated over 600 instances of crop raids by elephants across 49 villages. The landscape of this study included a mosaic of community-managed forests and four protected areas—Baghmara Reserve Forest, Balphakram National Park, Siju

Wildlife Sanctuary, and Rewak Reserve Forest—interspersed with agricultural lands and human settlements. In this area, the conservation team determined that a variety of factors shaped elephant crop raiding patterns, including local cultivation practices, long-term rainfall patterns, density of villages, distances to forests, and terrain.

Based on these findings, the researchers created predictive maps of elephant crop consumption across the larger landscape for different crop seasons and made recommendations for effective conflict reduction. This modeling will ultimately allow conservationists to better mitigate human-wildlife conflict and shows promise for fostering the coexistence of people and wildlife.

Wildlife trade is an immense, international, multi-billion dollar commercial enterprise, a large proportion of which is illegal. Within Asia, much of this trade starts in Indonesia, one of the world's 10 megadiverse countries and the largest supplier of wildlife products in the region. Working with key stakeholders, WCS operates the Wildlife Crimes Unit (WCU) within Indonesia. The team protects threatened species in four ways; we gather intelligence, facilitate vital information sharing, help strengthen law enforcement, and advance national policy on wildlife trafficking. This unit has substantially bolstered the number of wildlife-related arrests and has a successful prosecution rate of over 90 percent, compared to only 5 percent where WCS is not involved.

Earlier this year the WCU assisted in the arrest of a major ivory trader and smuggler in Bintuhan, a notorious transit city for ivory, tiger skins, and other wildlife contraband. The police confiscated

numerous carved ivory smoking pipes and swagger sticks, which are ornamental canes. The suspect had ordered ivory from local dealers in Riau and Lampung, and the carved pieces were planned to be distributed in South Sumatra, Bengkulu, Lampung, and Jakarta. The trader admitted to police that he had been involved in the ivory trade for at least five years. Investigators are continuing to unravel this ivory trade syndicate and track the hunting locations. Under Indonesian law, trafficking ivory is punishable with a penalty of five years maximum imprisonment and a maximum fine of \$10,000.

This arrest sends a clear message that wildlife trafficking in Indonesia will not be tolerated and serves as a deterrent to other potential traders. The Asian elephant is Endangered and the populations in Sumatra are under great threat. These efforts will help bring an end to relentless poaching and illegal trade.

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