
African Elephants Could be Extinct in Our Lifetime, Warn Experts

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The Africa Elephant Summit, held at a tourist resort in Kasane, gathered delegates from about 20 countries across Europe, Africa and Asia, including China, which is accused of fuelling the illegal poaching trade.

"This species could be extinct in our lifetime if the current trend continues..., within one or two decades," Dune Ives, senior researcher at Vulcan, a philanthropic organisation run by US billionaire Paul Allen, said.

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"In five years we may have lost the opportunity to save this magnificent and iconic animal."

The conference heard latest figures from the International Union for Conservation of Nature,

which reported that the African elephant population had dropped from 550,000 in 2006 to 470,000 in 2013.

East Africa has seen the worst decline, from 150,000 to about 100,000.

"The overall objective of this meeting is to secure commitments at the highest political level to effectively protect the elephants and significantly reduce the trends of killings of elephants," said Elias Magosi, from the Botswanan Environment Ministry.

"The current killing rate is unsustainable and the population of African elephant is in danger."

Elephant hunting is often organised by international criminal networks to supply the illegal ivory market, mainly in Asia, with some profits thought to fund regional conflicts and militants.

"These syndicates take advantage of conflicts, social unrest, poor governance," Magosi said.

Ivory Trading Routes

TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring group, said ivory trading routes showed the flow from Kenya and Tanzania to transit countries including Malaysia, Vietnam and Philippines, before going on final markets in China and Thailand.

"Thailand is still a country of great concern," Tom Milliken of TRAFFIC said.

"(But) China is the most important country that we are dealing with in the world with respect to illegal ivory trade."

The conference follows up a 2013 meeting when 30 countries adopted a set of urgent conservation measures, including a call to unite against poaching and for improved criminal prosecution.

On Wednesday, the Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) will also meet in Kasane to focus on the trafficking of all threatened species, an illegal trade worth \$19 billion a year, according to thec

Ivory is reportedly bought at \$100 per kilogramme (\$45 per pound) from poachers, and sold for \$2,100 in China.

Julian Blanc, an elephant specialist for the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), said the link between poverty in Africa and poaching highlighted one way to tackle the illegal killing of elephants.

"We have monitored a direct correlation between human infant mortality (a measure of poverty) at district level and levels of poaching," he said.

"In places where there is high level of infant mortality and poverty, we monitored the highest level of elephant poaching..., so addressing poverty is a significant component of elephant conservation."