



Mark Carwardine's **AT A GLANCE...**

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IVORY TRADE

WHAT IS IVORY?

The word 'ivory' usually refers to the tusks (enlarged upper incisors) of elephants and extinct mammoths and mastodons. Tusks are found in almost all African elephants (they are much larger in males – the record is 3.5m long) and some male Asian elephants. However, 'ivory' can correctly be used to describe any mammalian tooth – such as from hippos, walruses, narwhals and sperm whales – which is large enough to be carved or engraved.

HOW MANY ELEPHANTS ARE BEING KILLED FOR THEIR IVORY?

As many as 30,000 every year, by poachers using helicopters, military-grade weaponry, snares, poisoned pumpkins, and cyanide (which is dumped into watering holes). The killing is organised by criminal syndicates (some linked to terrorist organisations – Al-Shabab, for example, the Somalia-based wing of Al-Qaeda, raises up to US\$600,000 a month from poaching to fund its activities). Poaching has been most severe in Africa, where elephant numbers have declined from more than 1.3 million in 1979, to 600,000 in 1989, to fewer than 400,000 today.

WHAT IS THE IVORY USED FOR?

It has been prized for its beauty, durability and suitability for carving since prehistoric times. Before plastics it was used to make cutlery handles, musical

instruments, combs, billiard balls and many other items. By the late 1900s it was in huge demand for white piano keys, but the industry abandoned ivory in the 1970s. Nowadays, it is carved into anything from jewellery, chopsticks and figurines to chess sets, furniture inlays and mobile phone covers. Most ends up in China.

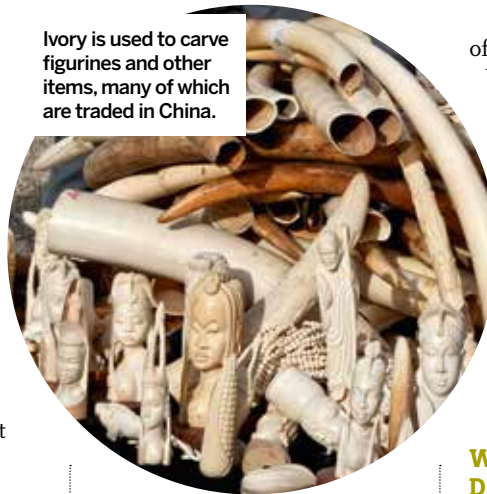
HOW MUCH IS IT WORTH?

The value of 'white gold' fluctuates wildly, depending on demand and availability. The wholesale price of raw ivory in China is currently about £570 per kilo – roughly one-third of the price just three years ago.

ISN'T IT ILLEGAL TO TRADE IN IVORY?

Yes and no. CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) banned international trade in ivory in 1989. However, in 1997, there was a resolution that allowed limited international 'one-off' sales of stockpiled ivory. Despite huge opposition from conservation groups, two sales took place: in 1999, 50 tonnes was sold to Japan by Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe; and, in 2008, 105 tonnes was sold to Japan and China by Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. It was a disaster, fuelling demand, providing an avenue for laundering illegal ivory, and confusing consumers – 'is ivory legal or not?' Since then Botswana (home to one-third

Ivory is used to carve figurines and other items, many of which are traded in China.



of Africa's elephants) has banned all future trade. And a number of countries have ceremoniously destroyed their confiscated ivory, to ensure that it can never be sold. Kenya was the first – it burned 12 tonnes on 18 July 1989 – and at least 20 countries have voluntarily destroyed a further 237 tonnes since.

WHAT ABOUT DOMESTIC TRADE?

By definition, CITES does not prohibit ivory trade within the borders of a country. Some countries ban it, others don't. The good news is that, in December 2016, China announced that it would shut down its domestic ivory market by the end of 2017. Astonishingly, despite repeated Conservative Party manifesto pledges, the UK remains one of the world's biggest exporters of legal ivory products, allowing trade in 'antique' ivory that was harvested before 1947 (though it is expensive to prove it's not new ivory from illegally killed elephants).

WHAT NEXT?

The only solution is to shut down all international and domestic ivory trade permanently – and to make ivory a shameful possession rather than a status symbol. Otherwise, efforts to save elephants will fail. 🐘

THE UK IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST EXPORTERS OF LEGAL IVORY PRODUCTS, AS DEALERS ARE ALLOWED TO SELL IVORY FROM PRE-1947."

MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

Every month he demystifies some of the most important issues affecting the world's wildlife and assesses the organisations that protect it.

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CITES rules on trade in ivory: <http://bit.ly/2rwhJFp>