



GROWING CHINA IVORY DEMAND KILLS MORE ELEPHANTS

China's growing wealth is exporting more workers to Africa and spurring demand for ivory trinkets at home. The result is more poaching, dead elephants and illegal ivory.

The countries most severely hit by elephant poaching gangs are the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). But there is concern that the presence of growing numbers of Chinese

on the continent but only five years later there were at least 500,000. They are some of the major buyers of ivory in Africa, especially in such countries as Sudan and Ethiopia. Fairly recently, I saw Chinese labourers visiting Khartoum's and Omdurman's souvenir shops in the evenings, pricing and buying ivory objects such as jewellery, animals, chopsticks and name seals. The latter two items are crafted in Omdurman specifically for the Chinese. I photographed ivory objects being bought by Chinese residents who purchase about 75% of the items, according to the vendors. Some Chinese were buying in bulk to take home.

In Ethiopia in 2008, Lucy Vigne and I surveyed retail outlets for ivory in Addis Ababa and found

In January 2009, three more Chinese were arrested at the Nairobi airport with carved ivory items; all were destined for different parts of China. In February 2009, the authorities at Nairobi's airport, with the aid of 'sniffer' dogs, arrested a Chinese man who was carrying ivory bangles he had brought from Guinea.

As well as ivory being smuggled by air, some ivory leaves Africa via sea ports. From East Africa, the main port for illegal ivory is Dar es Salaam. For example, as recently as March 2009, seven tonnes of ivory that had been shipped from Dar es Salaam port to Hai Phong port in northern Vietnam, close to the China border, were confiscated by Vietnamese officials. From West Africa, it is known that consignments of raw and worked ivory have been smuggled by Chinese sailors from Douala in Cameroon to China. Chinese sailors have been arrested in Douala several times.

There has been a recent increase in the number of elephants poached in Kenya, according to the *Annual Report 2008* of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). From 2003 to 2007 an average of 62 elephants were poached each year. The year 2008 witnessed more than a doubling of poached elephants from the previous year: from 48 to 98 animals. These figures from KWS refer only to known elephants poached, excluding those whose carcasses have not yet been found. They are therefore minimum figures.

It is a concern that the Chinese could be encouraging poaching by buying ivory in Kenya, as they are doing in other African countries, for export to China, but no Chinese people have yet been caught in the country with ivory. The number of Chinese coming to work in Kenya has increased substantially over the last few years. In 2001 there were an estimated 190 Chinese residents, but by 2007 there were 5,000, according to the *African Studies Review* of December 2007. In 2008/9 many Chinese workers were developing new roads in northern Kenya (such as the Isiolo and Marsabit Road) and southern Kenya (near Amboseli). Both regions are famous for their elephants. According to informants, Chinese are willing to buy ivory and rhino horn. There has been a growth in demand for ivory with the price of tusks rising from 2007 to early 2009. In northern Kenya, Isiolo traders bought ivory from Samburu poachers in early 2007 for KSh 1,500



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workers in Kenya could encourage a further surge in poaching there.

For more than 7,000 years, Chinese artisans have been working ivory, mostly for the elite, but nowadays the ever-increasing middle class can also afford to buy. Additionally, Chinese living in other countries of South and East Asia are buying an increasing number of ivory objects. This has been compounded in recent years by an extremely fast growing Chinese population in Africa. Chinese workers are being employed all over Africa's elephant range states, often to build roads and to undertake other construction work, while Chinese shops are also expanding over the continent.

In 2001, there were an estimated 72,000 Chinese nationals resident

149 pairs of newly-made chopsticks and 70 new name seals mostly for Chinese customers. The laws in Sudan and Ethiopia make the sale of newly-made ivory objects illegal, but demand by the Chinese encourages craftsmen to make and shopkeepers to sell these illicit goods.

Chinese are also buying many ivory objects in central and West Africa. Some use Nairobi airport as a transit point. In July 2008 three Chinese were caught in transit at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport with ivory chopsticks and bangles which they had obtained in Lubumbashi in the DRC. They were on their way to Harare; they claimed to the authorities in Kenya that these items were actually made out of a special white wood.

Above: In 2005 over 11,000 ivory items made in Sudan were on display for sale in 50 shops in Khartoum and Omdurman. Most of the buyers were Chinese.



(\$22) per kilo; by October 2008 the price had risen to KSh 2,250 (\$33) per kilo. In southern Kenya in early 2009, in the Amboseli area, Maasai poachers were selling tusks for KSh 3,000 (\$38) per kilo) and for \$63 per kilo just across the border in Tanzania.

From the Isiolo region, tusks are taken northwards to Moyale and Mandera on the Ethiopian border. Most of this ivory is reaching Addis Ababa to be crafted into items mainly for the Chinese market. From Isiolo, perhaps some of the ivory is moving to Nairobi or Mombasa destined for China or Thailand, as these are the two main countries carving illegal ivory in Asia. From the Amboseli region, some of the ivory being sold by poachers travels south into Tanzania and some moves northwards to Nairobi. In Tanzania this ivory is probably being shipped out of Dar es Salaam, along with other consignments of tusks. A lorry travelling north from the Amboseli area was caught in April 2009 with over 700 kilos, supposedly going to Nairobi. A Kenyan and a Tanzanian pleaded guilty to illegal possession of this ivory. It was one of the largest seizures in Kenya for years. Which traders were involved is not clear as the lorry drivers were arrested, rather than the lorry being followed to its destination.

Even traders in wealthy industrial countries are involved in the illicit ivory commerce with China. Dan Stiles and I were surprised to discover large quantities of newly-crafted ivory items for sale in the USA in 2006 and 2007. Virtually all of these were made from African tusks. Shops on the west coast and in Hawaii, whose proprietors have close relations with Hong Kong and China, had the most. We found 7,400 newly-made (post-1990) items for sale in the USA, almost all from China. Of course, all these recent imports break the laws of China and of the USA.

China itself, including Hong Kong, has the largest retail ivory market in the world. Stiles and I counted over 47,000 ivory items on retail sale in 2002—2004, and we covered only the east coast of China. The country with the second largest total of ivory objects is the USA with about half the number seen in China. Of these, about one-third were newly made and from



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Above: The Chinese Buyer shows an ivory hippo that he had just bought with the chopsticks.

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China.

Where does the majority of the new illegal raw ivory originate? The answer is central Africa. Nigel Hunter, Tom Milliken and I wrote a paper for *Pachyderm* 36 (2004) in which we estimated that between 4,900 and 12,000 elephants from central Africa are poached each year to supply tusks to the craftsmen of Africa, China and Thailand. The country with the biggest number of ivory craftsmen is China. The countries in Africa most severely hit by elephant poaching gangs are the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan and the DRC. For instance, the large elephant population formerly found in the Garamba National Park in northern DRC has fallen from 23,000 in the late 1970s to 3,800 in early 2009.

The explanation for this slaughter of elephants in central Africa over the past two decades is multifaceted. China's demand for tusks and worked ivory (especially jewellery, animal carvings, chopsticks and name seals) is an important reason but there are other factors such as the ease of buying and exporting ivory, both retail and wholesale,

from many central African countries. The cities of the region are home to large, unregulated and illegal ivory markets, making the purchase of ivory simple. The political and economic mismanagement for which this part of Africa is known, has resulted in breakdowns in law and order, easy availability of firearms, massive unemployment, chronic poverty and serious corruption at all levels of government and the private sector. All this greatly facilitates the poaching of elephants and the movement of their tusks and ivory items out of the country to other parts of the world, especially China.

International conservation organizations are aware that for the past decade or so China has been the main importer of illegal ivory in the world. From 1998 to 2006, at least 39 tonnes of ivory were seized for the Chinese market, some en route to China and the rest by Chinese officials at ports, airports, border crossings, and from traders within China. The Chinese have improved their law enforcement recently, but there is also a great deal of ivory that is successfully smuggled into the country and not caught by the authorities.

In late 2008 the CITES authorities allowed China to bid (with Japan) for tusks from official stockpiles in four southern African countries to be consumed within China. Twelve Chinese traders purchased 62 tonnes at an average price of \$144 per kilo, an extremely low price, as similar tusks sell for at least \$500 per kilo within China. Perhaps this purchase of such a substantial amount of inexpensive ivory will lower the value of new illegal tusks coming into China and consequently reduce the economic incentive to poach elephants in Africa and Asia. In contrast, the increasing numbers of Chinese working in Africa and the expanding wealth in China are stimulating sales of new ivory which could promote further elephant poaching. Regular, intensive monitoring of ivory markets involving fieldwork in the relevant African and Asian countries is essential.

Only by understanding the ivory trade dynamics can the Chinese threat on Africa's elephant populations be tackled effectively. ●

— Esmond Bradley Martin

AFRICAN IVORY – THE LUANDA LISBON AXIS

The result of my 2008 survey of ivory in Portugal was a surprise. Lisbon, the small capital city of Portugal, offered for sale 150 items of African ivory. This is the second highest amount of African-carved ivory for sale of any surveyed city outside Africa. While African ivory figurines, busts, carved tusks and jewellery are readily available all over Africa, they are relatively rare in Asia, Europe and North America.

In 2006, Dan Stiles and I appraised ivory markets in the USA and found the most African ivory items (numbering 20) in New York City, which was less than 1% of its

presence of ivory in Portugal is the relationship between Portugal and its former colonies and possessions in Africa and Asia, which was close and is still strong. Beginning in the early 16th century Portuguese traders gave samples of what they wanted copied to ivory craftsmen living in their possessions in India and later in Ceylon and China. Many were religious figurines. Missionaries used them to help convert people to Christianity and others, now antiques, are commonly for sale in Lisbon.

Earlier, in the 15th century, in building their commercial empire,

I found three 'Oliphants' for sale in late 2008 for sale in Lisbon, some 30 cm long costing \$5,000.

crucifixes, Madonna figurines and saints for the Portuguese in the 16th century. They also used whole tusks to carve into musical horns called 'Oliphants'. Influenced by Portuguese traders they decorated these with carvings of Portuguese as well as African people; they also added a hanging device for display. Unlike the Sapi ivories, scholars are not sure if these were destined for Europe or used locally. The Kongo people continued to make 'Oliphants' in the 18th and 19th centuries and I found three for sale in late 2008 in Lisbon. They were some 30 cm long and priced at about \$5,000 each.

At around the same time, the Pinda, who lived north of Luanda and were maybe a sub-tribe of the Kongo, were carving high quality human figurines for their religion. These are in great demand by col-



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total ivory stock of 11,376 objects. Asian cities offer for sale even fewer African ivory items. Previous surveys of European ivory markets, including those of TRAFFIC, and a study by Dan Stiles and myself in 2004, had excluded Portugal, believing the country's ivory content too small to be significant. But this 2008 survey showed that Lisbon had many more African ivory items for sale than larger European cities such as Barcelona, Madrid, Milan and Rome. Only London had more, 166. In fractional terms, Lisbon's African ivory comes second after Brussels with 24% of a total 626 ivory items; London's was 2% of 8,325.

The main reason for the preva-

the Portuguese had taken control of parts of West Africa. Starting around 1490, ethnic groups such as the Sapi of Sierra Leone produced for the European market some magnificent ivory works. These included carved tusks incorporating Portuguese motives, and utilitarian items such as salt cellars and spoons. Many are now in public museums. I found no Sapi objects for sale in Lisbon due to their rarity.

As the Portuguese moved south down the African coast, they established trading links and later built towns in Angola. The Kongo people, who lived in Angola and what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), produced ivory

Above left: The Lisbon Police regularly check the markets for contraband including new illegal wildlife products.

Above right: The Saturday market in Fiera da Ladra sells inexpensive ivory items from Africa and China, but there were no recently-crafted objects seen.

lectors. None was for sale in Lisbon in late 2008 as they are so rare. In the late 19th century, the Pinda and other tribes in Angola started making ivory items for the Portuguese and other Europeans living in the country. They crafted napkin rings, boxes, busts, carved tusks and animal or human figurines. By the 20th century, they were producing large amounts of ivory items for local European demand.

When Angola gained independence in the mid-1970s, the Portuguese had to leave. The new regime nationalised most of the Portuguese-owned land and many businesses: the local currency became worthless. As a way of



moving their wealth, the departing Portuguese took large quantities of tusks and worked ivory with them, but many had to leave their possessions behind. Mozambique also got independence from Portugal in the mid-1970s. There, most Portuguese left by road to South Africa and were able to take their belongings, including their ivory, packed in their vehicles. This explains why there are far fewer older ivory items and tusks in Portugal from Mozambique compared to Angola.

In more recent years, Portuguese visiting Angola as businessmen, contract workers and aid officials have collected some of their old ivory, raw and worked, that was left behind, and have also been buying new ivory items that are seen openly for sale. Since 1986, the Portuguese authorities have been registering the raw tusks in Portugal and so far have recorded 20 tonnes; many of these are privately owned and were brought in before 1990, but a lot of tusks have not yet been registered. Since the 1990 CITES ivory ban on imports and exports, the Portuguese have remained prominent buyers of African ivory, most from Angola, but some from Mozambique. This is because it is one of the few valuable materials available to buy, they like African-worked ivory, it is openly on sale, and it is easy to smuggle out.

While some Portuguese visiting Africa will take the risk of smuggling ivory into Portugal, others are unaware of the continuing ban on ivory. From 2003-2007 there were 108 official seizures of ivory consisting of 925 pieces (raw and worked), nearly all from Africa, much of it made in Angola before independence. A lot more gets into the country and is kept as personal possessions while some is offered for sale.

Portuguese authorities try to be vigilant in stopping the illegal entry of ivory. They have even confiscated an elephant. In 2006, a Swedish circus worker wanted to retire to Portugal with her pet female elephant. She received an EU permit to take her pet by truck through Europe, but the border guards refused to allow the elephant to enter

Portugal since it is against the law for a private individual to own a dangerous animal. The authorities sent the elephant to a zoo in the Algarve in southern Portugal and brought a court case against the Swedish woman, who lost legal ownership of the animal. She responded by breaking into the zoo at night, 'stealing' her elephant, smuggling it out of Portugal and returning with it to Sweden. Some officials were sympathetic, others were furious, as government property had been stolen!

Lisbon in 2008 had 59 retail outlets selling ivory items of which 25 were African items. Of the 626 ivory objects (of which 150 were African) counted for the survey, only 17 were recently carved (post 1999) with just two of these crafted in Africa. These were a bust for \$99



It was just another early morning start to find and photograph three white rhinos that had so far evaded me. I searched the areas where two of them were usually found and then headed down the inner West road to relocate a new mother and calf. I noticed a rhino that seemed to be oddly crouched with its back towards me on an open space just off the road. As I got nearer I could see it was badly injured with a gaping hole in its rear with a lump of skin hanging off. I was surprised that it did not stand up because of the noise of the car. I drew parallel to it and turned to saw the shocking sight of just flesh and blood where the horns should have been. Poachers had been at work, and only a few hours before.

Immediately I alerted the Reserves Head of Security

Catching Poachers - blood and death on poaching's front line

who gathered together a team of rangers and called for support from the police in the form of the locally based General Service Unit (GSU), best explained as a heavily armed 'commando' force. All were soon on the scene.

An examination of the carcass revealed it was the 30+ years adult male Sungari. The horns had been expertly removed with a panga..

There were several spear

marks on its flanks and it seemed to have been killed by a spear being inserted in one side and pushed through to the other via its heart. The rhino must have been immobilised for this. The wound in the rear was probably made by two or three cuts with the panga. It was surmised that an arrow with some form of poison was fired into the rear of the (probably running) rhino which incapacitated it. Then the spear would have been sunk in

and a hair ornament for \$43. Nearly all the African carvings were from the 1960s and early 1970s and were better quality and more expensive, for example, averaging at \$500 for a bust. It is legal to trade in ivory items within Portugal if there is an authentic certificate stating that the object is old. Most ivory items in the antique shops do have certificates. In practice, some buyers do not bother with a certificate unless wishing to export the item. Although all ivory objects should have documentation stating the age of the items, and are meant to be registered, the government is understaffed to check all retail outlets, let alone private houses. Registration is ongoing but slow.

Of the African ivory items counted for sale in Lisbon, 95% were Angolan, 3% were from the DRC, and just one item was definitely from Mozambique. Most were figurines followed by busts and carved tusks. There was also a skull of an elephant with tusks weighing 80 kilos from Angola brought into Portugal around 1974 that was on sale for \$284,000. Before the CITES ivory ban, Americans were the main buyers of ivory objects. After the ban, sales declined and the main buyers became the Portuguese, plus a few other European nationalities.

The main reason that so much ivory from Africa has been either officially seized or smuggled into Portugal since 1990 is because it is easily obtained from Angola and Mozambique, and the Portuguese have a stronger preference for African ivory carvings than most other nationalities outside Africa. Nearly all the plentiful ivory for sale in Angola and Mozambique is recently-made and thus illegal by national law. TRAFFIC surveyed markets in and around Angola's capital, Luanda, in 2005 and found at least 2,000 ivory items weighing an estimated 1,570 kilos for retail sale. The largest amount was in the Mercado do Artesanato and consisted predominantly of figures, busts, carved tusks and jewellery aimed at European, American and other foreign buyers. A curio shop in the duty free section of Luanda international airport was selling ivory jewellery for export, despite this being illegal under Angolan law (Angola is not a member of CITES). The Angolan authorities lack the political will to enforce their own laws, according to TRAFFIC. Portuguese officials are aware of all the ivory for sale illicitly in Angola and say that corruption makes it easy to move ivory out of Angola without needed documents.

The situation is similar in Mozambique where in 1999 I found

over 1,000 new ivory items for sale in Maputo's international airport's retail outlets, including the duty free shops, despite Mozambique being a member of CITES. I counted 3,619 ivory objects for retail sale in Maputo, mostly on pavements and in temporary stalls near expensive hotels. As well as the usual jewellery, figurines, and carved or polished tusks, other common items were paper knives, butter knives and amulets. In 2005, TRAFFIC counted over 3,000 new ivory items for retail sale in Maputo, including 588 objects at the international airport's duty free shops. As in Angola, the main buyers for Mozambique's ivory are Europeans, including Portuguese, with very few local customers.

Both Angola and Mozambique, but especially Angola, increased ties with Portugal after independence. Inept officials ignore traders selling ivory items that are openly on display in both Luanda and Maputo. Incompetence and corruption at the points of exit let foreigners take ivory out of both countries. Although some is found and confiscated by officials on arrival in Portugal, a lot gets through, usually for personal use. Unfortunately, many people bringing ivory into Portugal are uninformed about ivory laws, and so illegal imports continue. Thus Portugal remains an important centre for African ivory. ●

– Esmond Bradley Martin

Inept officials ignore traders selling ivory items that are openly on display in both Luanda and Maputo.

to kill the rhino before the horns were removed. The arrow would have been cut out of the rump so as to leave no evidence. Senior officers of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) arrived to make an official report on the incident and had brought with them a metal detector to determine if any metallic evidence (bullet, arrow head etc) remained. There was none.

Rangers found where the poachers had entered and exited the reserve by cutting the fence. Here there were a few good prints in the soft sand. Highly trained blood hounds were called for. The dog handler collected the soil in a plastic bag and gave it to the dog to smell. It was off immediately covering several kilometers through bush areas and grass plains to a newly built village east of the reserve but the dog could go no further with all the different smells of

the village hiding those it was following.

The poachers were likely to try again. Despite the inhospitable winter cold and uncomfortable conditions, a team of elite Solio rangers started a series of all-night vigils with support from GSU. Their patience was rewarded. Two weeks after the poaching, late one evening, they heard voices. Quietly the teams assembled to form an ambush. There were four poachers and one went forward to cut the fence. At this they were challenged to surrender but refused. Warning shots were fired but the poachers aimed and threw their spears at the rangers. In the ensuing pitch-dark melee, one poacher was inadvertently killed and two others, whilst wounded, managed to escape. They left behind several spears, a panga, a knife and a torch. Luckily no ranger or police officer

was hurt.

Next morning word came that one of the wounded poachers had been found and arrested. The other two have been identified and are being sought.

This was not the first poached rhino in the region. Several rhinos and many more elephants have been killed over the past months. There are a number of gangs at work as some poaching is done using semi-automatic weapons, some by cable snare and others by bow, poison arrows and spear. However this was the second gang to be caught with a poacher losing their life on both occasions sending out the message to those who would try that rhino poaching can be a deadly business. ●

– Felix Patton

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