

WENDY MARUYAMA

The wildLIFE Project



INTRODUCTION

With a career spanning four decades, artist and educator Wendy Maruyama designs furniture pieces and imbues them with artistic references and themes related to her Japanese heritage. Fascinated by her immigrant grandparents' roots, Maruyama has worked over the last decade to create art about behaviors that inspire both emulation and satire in Japanese culture, from clean lines and symmetry to what the artist calls "a proliferation of Hello Kitty adult toys, all things related to Godzilla, and nasty comic books." Born in La Junta, Colorado, to second-generation Japanese American parents, she has made several pilgrimages to the land of her heritage, and Maruyama vacillates between creating works that both mirror and parody its culture.

The furniture movement of the 1980s, which marked the beginning of Maruyama's career, was influenced by Post-Modernism and Abstract Expressionism. Artists like Maruyama began to challenge traditions, turning towards the conceptual and away from purity of form and materials. Furniture was transformed into hybrid objects that combined both natural woods and traditional joinery techniques with manufactured materials and hardware. Artists reflected on the past, constructing visual critiques through pastiche forms. Colors were bolder and richer, and designs masked their utilitarian intentions. Maruyama developed her signature forms through this exploration of history and concept. Her shapes became more abstracted and began to resemble pods or shields, while her surfaces were painted with daring and lavish colors, highlighting the textures created by her tool marks.

Incredibly innovative and always going against the grain, Maruyama's early work combined ideologies of feminism and studio-furniture forms. Her practice continues to move beyond the boundaries of traditional studio craft and into the realm of social practice. *The wildLIFE Project* serves to illustrate the plight of elephants, rhinoceros and other endangered wildlife, a cause that is very personal to the artist. During a sojourn to Kenya, she met with wildlife advocates to investigate the dangers of continued poaching of both elephants and rhinos. In recent years, her work has taken a narrative direction, integrating images and text into shrine-like cabinet forms, which add an additional layer of sensory experience for the viewer. The exhibition is made up of object-based works, combined with a societal message about the dangers of poaching and the need to preserve animals in the wild.

The elephant is memorialized in monumental form in *The wildLIFE Project*. The heads range from eight to 12 feet in height and are constructed from panels of wood, tied together with string. Maruyama adapts the Buddhist ritual of honoring the dead and examines the meanings of different components of the Buddhist altar (*obutsudan*). In this context, the central object of reverence or worship (*Gohonzon*) is the elephant—tortured, killed and driven almost to extinction by man. Flowers are used to represent the impermanence of this gentle and majestic animal. A candle is placed on the altar to symbolize unchanging truth. Incense are burned as an offering in an attempt to capture the spiritual state in the present moment. A wooden reliquary is made to house life-sized, hand-blown glass tusks, symbolizing the preciousness of both the elephant and the ivory for which it is sourced.

The altars in the exhibition are constructed from steel and glass—raw materials that are meant to transfer emotion. Steel is immovable, permanent, and heavy; glass is fragile and opaque when stacked together. The untitled bell shrine is fabricated from claro walnut salvaged from a defunct rifle factory. The bell is set to ring every 15 minutes, in honor of every elephant that is lost to poaching. Maruyama views this work not only as an art project but as an advocacy tool—one that brings communities together for a common purpose. The social-practice component of her art is successful in combining the four areas of art, advocacy, education, and community.

Above: African Elephants, Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Photo by Dave Block.
Left: Wendy Maruyama, "Bell Shrine" (detail). Wood, bronze, ink. 2015. Photo by David Harrison.



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HOMO SAPIENS AND PACHYDERMS

Ho-mo sa-pi-en
/hōmō 'sāpēən/
noun

Homo sapiens is the binomial nomenclature (the scientific name) for the human species. *Homo* is the human genus; *H. sapiens* is the only surviving species of the genus *Homo*.

Pach-y-derm
/'paka dɜrm/
noun

A very large mammal with thick skin, especially an elephant, rhinoceros, or hippopotamus.

Elephants are majestic creatures with the African elephant reigning as the largest land mammal. Adult males weigh between two and seven tons. Their lifespan is second only to that of humans, with the average elephant living to be 65-years-old.

Humans and elephants share a number of attributes, such as a social hierarchy. Like humans, elephants are instinctively aware of proper social behaviors that influence the daily activities of their herd. Familial ties are also very strong in both species. When members of the herd meet again after long periods of time, they bump foreheads, shake or twist trunks, and rub against one another.¹

As the saying goes, "An elephant never forgets." Research supports that elephants have excellent memories and like humans, have funerary rituals. Scientists have observed *pachyderms* mournfully handling elephant bones in their natural habitats. Just as we pay our own respects to those who we have lost, this action may be interpreted as the species' recognition of memory for their loved ones.²

Humans have been drawn to these gentle giants since the Ancient Roman era. Popular culture continues to immortalize these intelligent mammals, on and off the screen, with films like Disney's *Dumbo*. Despite our collective fascination, the relationship between humans and elephants is a tumultuous one.

Mankind has hunted elephants to the point of extinction. According to historians, the Romans wiped out North Africa's elephant population in 77 A.D. in pursuit of ivory. During the Industrial Revolution of the Nineteenth Century, there was a resurgence in the demand for this

commodity, which illegal trading has sustained.³ Within the last century, elephant populations have dropped from three million to under half-a-million, giving us charge to care for our fellow mammal.⁴

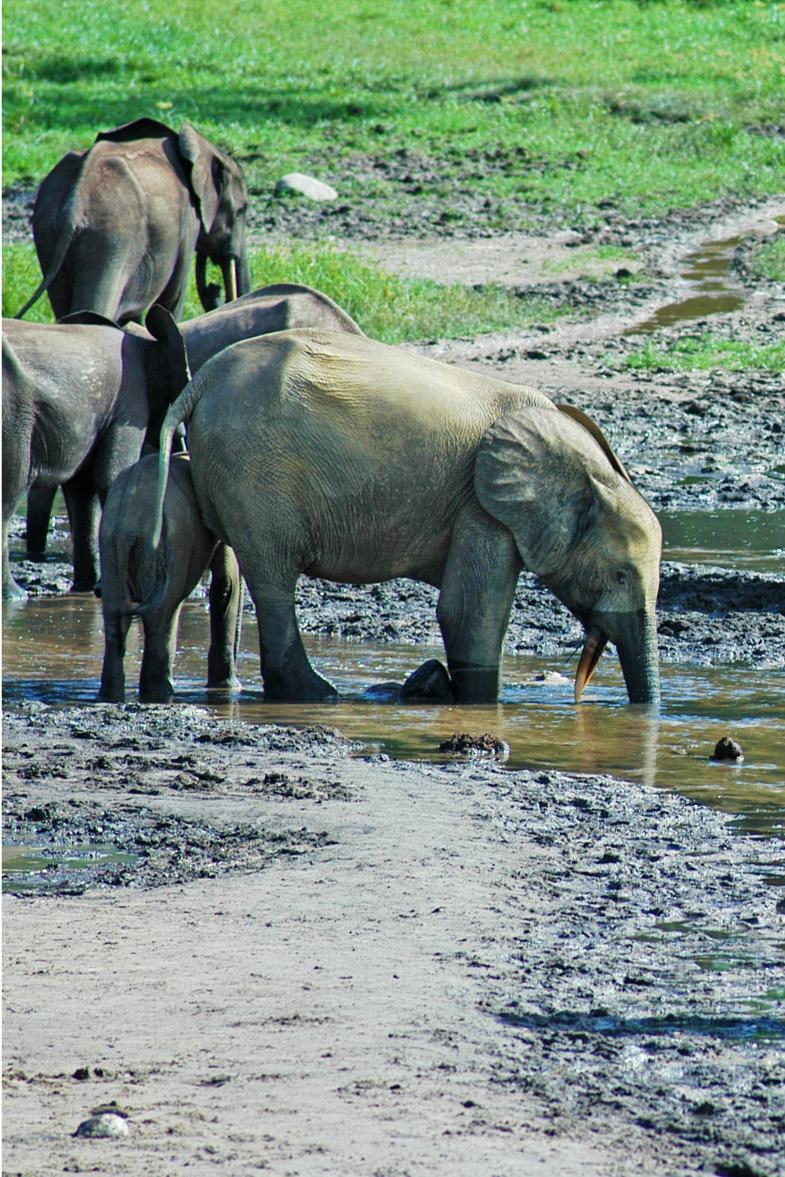
1. "Interesting Similarities between Humans and Elephants," Woodall Addo Elephant Park Accommodation, June 9, 2014, <http://www.woodall-addo.co.za/interesting-similarities-humans-elephants/>.
2. K McComb, L. Baker, and C. Moss, "African Elephants Show High Levels of Interest in the Skulls and Ivory of Their Own Species," *Biology Letters*, 2.1(March 22, 2006): 26-28.
3. Tim Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," *Africa Geographic* (April 2013): 34.
4. "Threats," *World Wildlife Fund*, <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/african-elephant>.

In what other ways are our two species alike?

Participate in the discussion by visiting the exhibition's blog:
www.wildlifeproject.tumblr.com.



Above: Elephants in Tanzania. Photo by Bruce Block.
Left: African Elephant, Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Photo by Peter Prokosch.



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WHITE GOLD OR BLOOD IVORY?

As a conflict resource in Africa, ivory is a commodity in wildlife trafficking circles putting organized crime at the forefront of the illegal killing of elephants and rhinos. The root cause of this bloodshed is the corruption of local officials, including those rangers paid to protect the elephants. The illegal ivory trade is a 7 to 10-billion-dollar-a-year industry fueled by supply and demand.¹

The most well known offenders are armed militias, such as the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, which is organized in Northern Uganda. Groups of armed horsemen from the Sudan also rank as some of Africa's most ill-famed elephant poachers. They travel after monsoon season, over large distances in raiding parties armed with AK 47s and trains of camels to carry their loot.²

In recent years, several attacks have been carried out by corrupt members of the Ugandan military using helicopters and trained gunmen to shoot their targets from the air. There are a multitude of criminal elements in the military of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (known as the DRC) and South Sudan, due to the financial gain involved in poaching illegal ivory. The International Union for Conservation of Nature Report found that the majority of poachers are motivated by profit rather than subsistence.³ Poverty, terrorism, and civil war all contribute to the demand for blood ivory. These profits aid in the finance of terrorist organizations, including Al Qaeda's Al Shabab wing, Joseph Kony's LRA, and the Janjaweed in Darfur.⁴

At the bottom of this cash pyramid are disenfranchised people who live at the edge of wildlife parks and ranges. These poachers bury the ivory in remote locations until they can sell it to traders in villages for immediate cash and status. In turn, government officials profit by supplying poachers with weapons and buying ivory from them at reduced costs.⁵

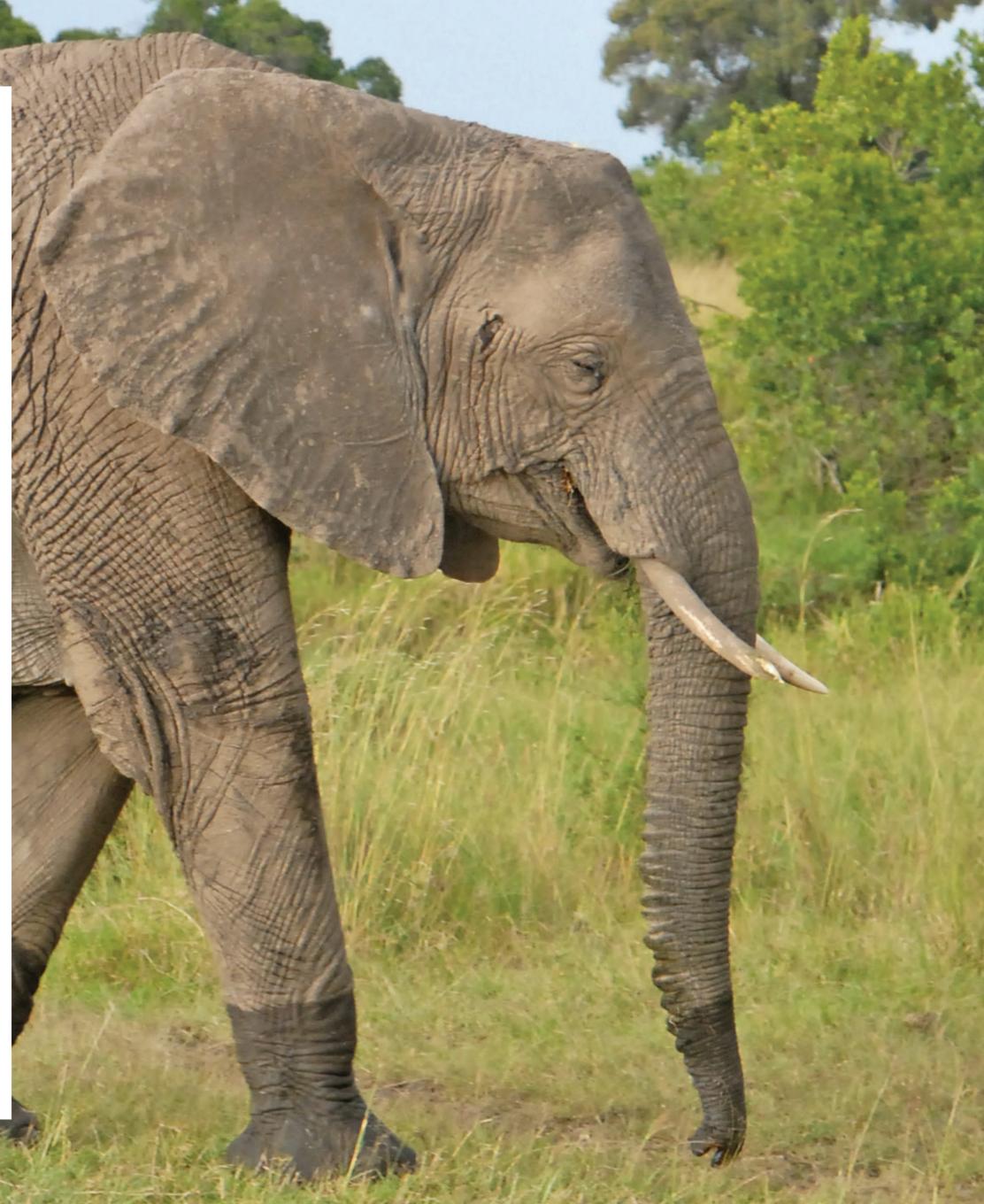
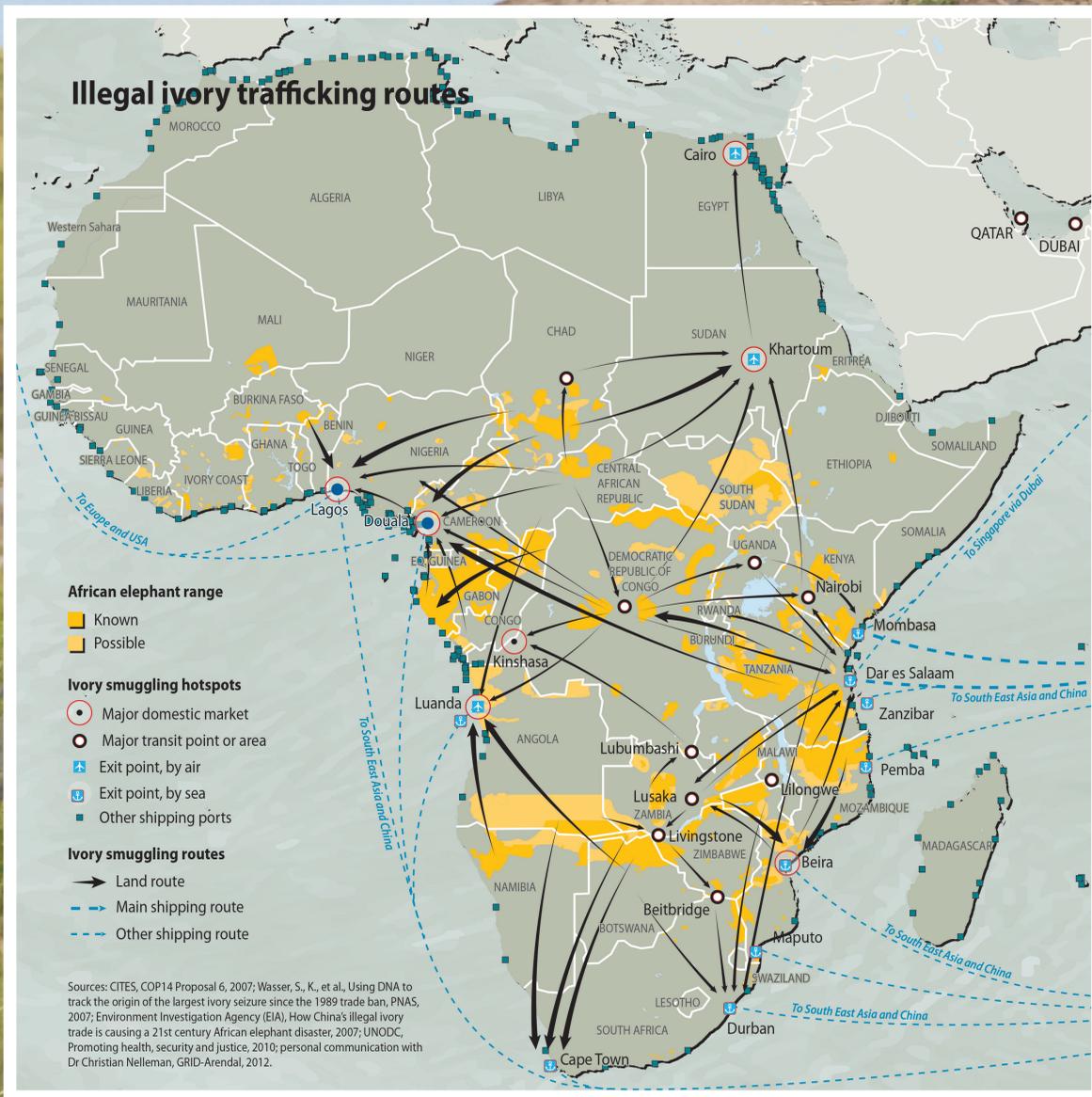
1. "Wildlife - Ivory Trade," Africa Network for Animal Welfare, <http://www.anaw-usa.org/issues/wildlife-ivory-trade>.
2. Tim Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," *Africa Geographic* (April 2013): 42-43.
3. *Ibid.*, 42-44.
4. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy as Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits," *New York Times*, September 3, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/world/africa/african-elephants-are-being-slaughtered-in-poaching-frenzy.html?_r=0.
5. Jackson, 45.

How would you help keep the elephants safe?

Participate in the discussion by visiting the exhibition's blog:
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Above: Male Elephant, Kruger National Park, South Africa. Photo by Peter Prokosch.
Left: Forest Elephants in the Dzanga Sangha Reserve, Central African Republic. Photo by Peter Prokosch.



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THE PATH TO DESTRUCTION: ILLEGAL IVORY ROUTES

From the continent's savannas and forests to the markets of Lagos, Kinshasa and Cairo, through the ports of Mombasa, Dar es Salaam and Cape Town, and on to Asia, the movement of ivory involves thousands of people, complex organization, and complicity and corruption at every level.¹

—Tim Jackson, Science Editor for *Africa Geographic*

Most of Africa's ivory is imported in tusk form to Asia with China as the continent's largest consumer, followed by Thailand.² In China, ivory sold for \$1,000 per pound on the streets of Beijing according to the *New York Times* in 2012.³ Two-thirds of confiscated ivory shipments in transit to Asia can be tracked back to Kenya and Tanzania. The largest shipments of ivory move by sea, with these two countries serving as the main ports of departure.⁴ Central Africa—namely, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, and the Republic of Congo—sources most of the world's ivory exports.⁵

As smuggling efforts increase, elephant populations decline at unprecedented numbers. The Wildlife Conservation Society estimates that poachers have decimated almost half of the elephant population in the Republic of Congo, which amounts to approximately 5,000 elephants in the past decade. The savanna region of West Africa has a mere 6,500 elephants. The increasing isolation of elephant herds poses a great threat to these otherwise social creatures.⁶

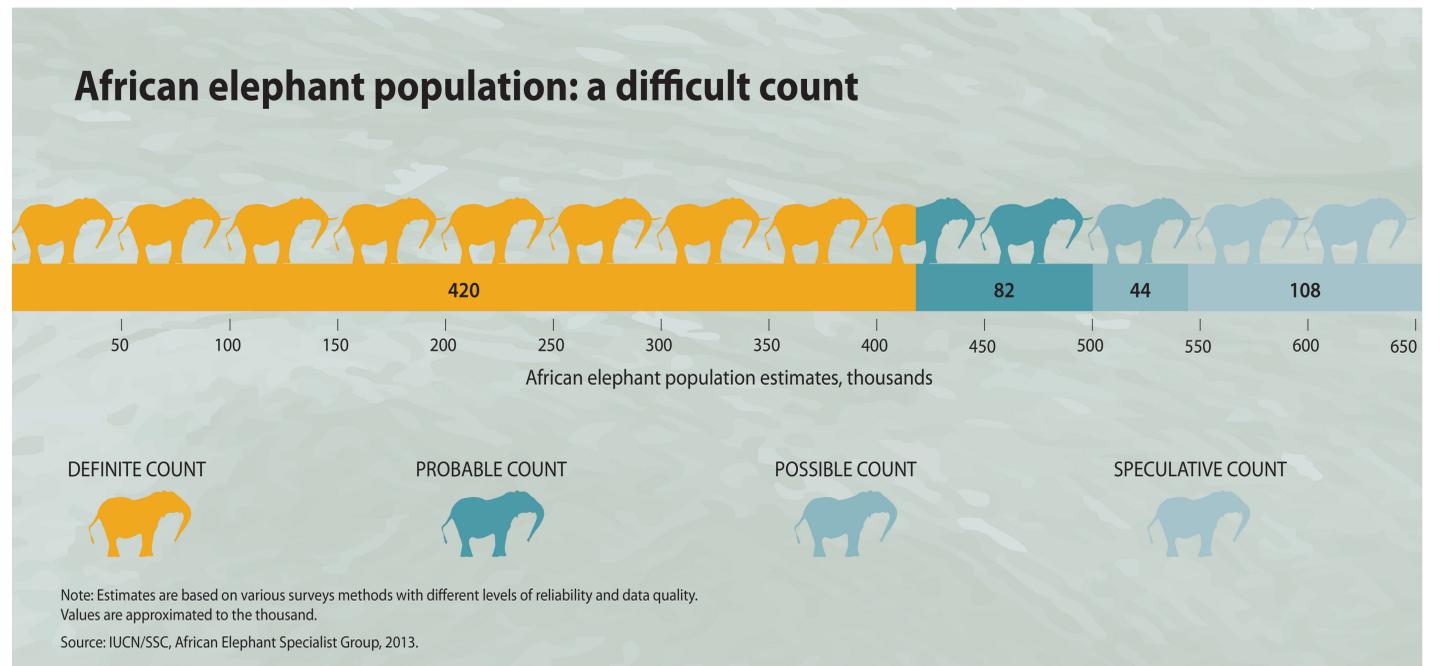
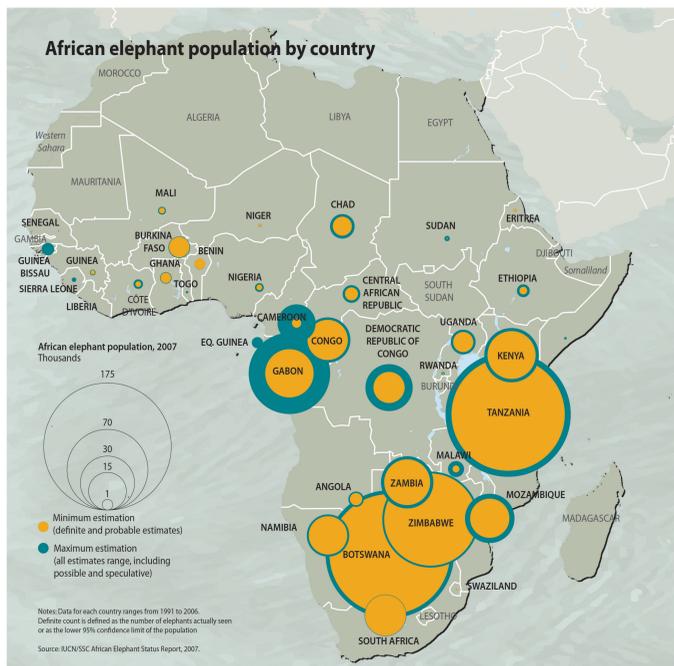
How can we create a global effort to enforce laws protecting our wildlife?

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Map: Illegal ivory trafficking routes. 28 Nov 2013 - by Riccardo Pravettoni, GRID-Arendal, http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/illegal-ivory-trafficking-routes_486e. Top image: African Savanna Elephant, Masai Mara Reserve, Kenya. Photo by Peter Prokosch. Left: Elephant tusk detail. Photo by Dirk Freder.

1. Tim Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," *Africa Geographic* (April 2013): 46.
2. Ibid, 50.
3. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Elephants Dying in Epic Frenzy as Ivory Fuels Wars and Profits," *New York Times*, September 3, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/04/world/africa/african-ivory-are-being-slaughtered-in-poaching-frenzy.html?_r=0.
4. Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," 47.
5. Ibid, 46.
6. Ibid, 39-41.



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PROTECTING ONE OF THE NATURAL WONDERS OF OUR WORLD

At the forefront of wildlife conservation is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) drafted in 1975. The purpose of CITES is to regulate the international trade of endangered species. In 1977, CITES amended its Appendix II to include the African elephant, *Loxodonta africana*.¹

Since the Middle Ages, North African elephants have faced extinction and they can only be found in Sub-Saharan Africa.² In 1989, CITES banned all international trade of African elephant ivory.³ In the decades following the inception of the CITES ban, elephant populations in several range states have seen some recovery.⁴

The African Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) was developed by CITES with the support of 38 African elephant range states during the 2010 CITES's Fifteenth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Qatar.⁵ The eight priority objectives outlined in the AEAP are as follows:

- Reduce the illegal killing of elephants and the illegal trade in elephant products.
- Maintain elephant habitats and restore their connectivity.
- Reduce human-elephant conflict.
- Increase awareness among key stakeholders that include policy makers, local communities among other interest groups.
- Strengthen range-state knowledge on African elephant management.

- Strengthen cooperation and understanding among range states.
- Improve local communities' cooperation and collaboration on elephant conservation.
- Effectively implement the African Elephant Action Plan.⁶

1. Christian Nellemann, ed., "Regulated, legal sales in ivory," in *Elephants in the Dust: The African Elephant Crisis: A Rapid Response Assessment*, (Norway: United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, International Union for Conservation of Nature, and Trade Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce, 2013), 12.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid., 23.
4. Tim Jackson, "Ivory Apocalypse," *Africa Geographic* (April 2013): 34.
5. Ibid., 52.
6. CITES (2010), COP 15 Inf. 68. Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties. Doha (Qatar), 13-25 March 2010. African Elephant Action Plan.

For more information on how you can help the African elephant range states to protect elephants in the wild, please visit, www.cites.org.

Clockwise, from top: African Bush Elephants, Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Photo by Peter Prokosch. African elephant population. 28 Nov 2013. Map by Riccardo Pravettoni, GRID-Arendal, http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/african-elephant-population-by-country_0858. Illegal ivory at Friendship Store, Guangzhou, China. Photos by Daniel Stiles. African elephant population by country. 28 Nov 2013. Map by Riccardo Pravettoni, GRID-Arendal, http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/african-elephant-population-a-different-count_6dc9.