



Human-Elephant Conflict

Numbering three to five million in the last century, African elephant populations were severely reduced to its current levels because of hunting. In the 1980s, an estimated 100,000 elephants were killed each year and up to 80% of herds were lost in some regions. In recent years, growing demand for ivory, particularly from Asia, has led to a surge in poaching. Populations of elephants—especially in southern and eastern Africa—that once showed promising signs of recovery could be at risk due to the recent surge in poaching for the illegal ivory trade.



The illegal demand for ivory is the biggest driver of elephant poaching. Despite a global ban on international sales of ivory since 1990, tens of thousands of elephants are killed to meet a growing demand for ivory products in the Far East. Asia stands behind a steadily increasing trend in illegal ivory and there are still thriving domestic ivory markets in Africa. Limited resources combined with remote and inaccessible elephant habitats make it difficult for governments to monitor and protect elephant herds. The impacts of war and over-exploitation of natural resources often lead to increased poaching as elephants are also regarded as source of wild meat. 2011 saw the highest volume of illegal ivory seized since global records began in 1989.



African elephants have less room to roam than ever before as expanding human populations convert land for agriculture, settlements and developments. The elephants' range shrank from three million square miles in 1979 to just over one million square miles in 2007. Commercial logging, plantations for biofuels and extractive industries like logging and mining not only destroy habitat but also open access to remote elephant forests for poachers. Poverty, armed conflict and the displacement of people by civil conflict also add to habitat loss and fragmentation. All of these push elephants into smaller islands of protected areas and hinder elephants' freedom to roam.



As habitats contract and human populations expand, people and elephants are increasingly coming into contact with each other. Where farms border elephant habitat or cross elephant migration corridors, damage to crops and villages can become commonplace. This often leads to conflicts that elephants invariably lose. But loss of life can occur on both sides, as people may be trampled while trying to protect their livelihoods, and game guards often shoot “problem” elephants.

