

Chinese Fuel Resurgence in Ivory Poaching

TRAILER

Two decades ago trading ivory was banned worldwide but last year the law was relaxed allowing government stockpiles to be sold off. 134 Chinese nationals have been arrested in Africa trying to smuggle illegal ivory back home and in the last decade there have been 426 cases of ivory seized on route to China.

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SCRIPT

COMMENTARY

This baby elephant lived for only a month. It died of dehydration after poachers killed its mother, keen to exploit one of Africa's most lucrative commodities – Ivory.

In the last year the international price has jumped to more than 1000 US dollars a kilo, prompting an unprecedented wave of poaching across the continent.

With a pair of tusks weighing up to 50 Kilo's - each elephant represents a fortune – a temptation for many to great to ignore.

Less than a mile away a giant bull elephant lies in a pool of maggots. He's just one of 37,000 African elephants slaughtered for their tusks each year.

Two decades ago trading ivory was banned worldwide but last year the law was relaxed allowing government stockpiles to be sold off.

Dr Esmond Bradley-Martin has been monitoring the illegal ivory trade for the past 30 years:

ITV, Dr Esmond Bradley-Martin, Conservationist (English)

“There is probably more ivory going illegally to China than any country in the world. I think there is a link between the number of Chinese who have come into Africa recently and elephant ivory purchasing - for instance in about 2000 / 2001 there was something like 75,000 Chinese working in Africa, now the figure is well over 500,000 and we now Chinese are being caught all over Africa, and in Kenya they have been caught with ivory coming in from the Congo, Cameroon – those are the recent ones. The Chinese have been carving ivory for over 7000 years but until recently only the wealthier people could buy it now the middle class has risen up in China and there is a much greater demand now.”

COMMENTARY

In what has been described by many as the new Colonialism and in defiance of the global recession China’s annual trade with Africa has soared to more than 100 billion dollars, a figure that is expected to grow by a further 80 per cent next year.

ITV, Asgar Pathan, Care for the Wild (English)

“If you look at all the poaching incidence taking place in East Africa it is where the Chinese are present – the northern part of Kenya – the Tsavo area, the Amboselie area – this is where the Chinese have been grading roads / constructing roads.”

COMMENTARY

The truth is 50% of ivory poaching in Kenya takes place within a 20-mile radius of Chinese road building projects.

Yet, the Kenyan Wildlife Service - a government body that aspires to be a world leader in wildlife protection, seems hesitant to point the finger at the Chinese – one of the counties primary international investor.

ITV, George Osuri, KWS Senior Warden, Amboseli National Park (English)

“Several Chinese nationals have been arrested with Ivory and at this moment I don’t want to say categorically that they are involved but once we are through and we crack the cartel we will then be able to tell you who is actually responsible for buying of the ivory. KWS in conjunction with the Tanzanian Wildlife Authorities – to some extent we are in control.”

COMMENTARY

But that is not view held by many of the conservation groups that feel they have little choice but to protect what elephants they have and are now upgrading their own private patrols and preparing to respond in force.

This is one of Kenya’s most effective private anti-poaching units - a 70 strong, heavily armed team with the mandate of protecting 100,000 acres in the Laikipia district of Northern Kenya.

They are on high alert after loosing 52 elephants in the last two years and are responding to a tip off that an elephant poacher is operating nearby.

ITV, Andy Marshall – Head of Anti-Poaching Team of Ol ari Nyiro, Laikipia (English)

“Everybody outside the conservancy has a weapon –everybody – and so they are now starting to bring their weapons inside the conservancy, it is very risky because these people will shoot, they will shoot without asking any questions. We have had a plane shot at, two poachers were shot. These people are armed and very well armed – G3 AK 47’s because the price of ivory is 12,000 shillings a KG and there fore everyone is going to chance their luck.”

COMMENTARY

East Africa is suffering from its worst drought in more than a decade, pushing as many as 23 million people to the brink of starvation.

Crops have failed, tens of thousands of cattle and goats have died and international appeals remain under funded.

This is just one of the many child-feeding stations scattered across the region providing welcome yet temporary relief but for adults desperate to scratch a living - poaching is the most attractive option available.

Nelson Mutonga was orphaned as a young boy and started poaching soon afterwards. Last month he was caught red handed after killing an elephant and a rhino but was offered a pardon in exchange for intelligence into the ivory smuggling underworld and becoming a member of a private anti poaching unit.

He describes how he killed the elephants.

ITV, Nelson Mutonga, Former Elephant Poacher (Swahili)

“I took a bow and arrows and dip the head of the arrows in very strong poison. I then shot at the elephant’s rib cage, which is close to its lungs. It dies within a few minutes.”

COMMENTARY

He then sells the ivory to a local broker who passes it on to Chinese trader in Mombassa.

“Chinese `Chinese.”

COMMENTARY

134 Chinese nationals have been arrested in Africa trying to smuggle illegal ivory back home and in the last decade there have been 426 cases of ivory seized on route to China.

This haul is the largest ever discovered on Kenyan soil - 703 Kg – It was found in a car driven by these two men and owned by an ex Kenyan Member of Parliament – the parliamentary car pass is still intact on the windscreen.

The Ex MP has denied it's his car despite vehicle registration documents proving his ownership.

The drivers were forced to pay a fine of 250 US dollars, which stand as a small deterrent.

If poaching continues at current levels experts predict the extinction of elephants across most of sub-Saharan Africa within the next fifteen years.

Without a concerted international effort to stem the resurgence of ivory poaching images like this will soon become a thing of the past.

END