
BOOK REVIEW

The Ivory Markets of Africa, by Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles

(Save the Elephants, PO Box 54667, Nairobi, Kenya, and
7 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, London WC2A 3RA, England, 2000)

review by Kees Rookmaaker

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The two investigators, Drs Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles, between them visited 17 cities in 13 African countries between May and November 1999 to establish a set of baseline data about the ivory trade. They tried to cover just about every angle relating to the market of ivory on the African continent, including the quantities of displayed retail worked ivory, the price of raw and worked ivory, and the number of retail outlets and workshops. Many other details are also included.

The result is an information-packed book of 84 closely printed pages, which should indeed be a starting point for any future research to be conducted along compatible lines. The methods that the two researchers used were not quite the same, and it would be advisable in future to use exactly the same questionnaire or methodology.

Just a line from the summary shows the mind-staggering amount of data collected: 110,000 ivory items were found displayed in 657 outlets in 15 countries (including two the authors had studied earlier). We all know that ivory trade is much restricted by CITES rules, to which all these 15 countries subscribe, even if sometimes more on paper than in reality, and to gather this kind of information is not always without personal danger.

I found it remarkable that the three East African states were excluded from the survey, but I was told in a letter from Dr Esmond Martin that presently there

is no retail trade of ivory there. Maybe that should have been stated in this volume.

The trade in ivory has experienced a marked drop since the start of the CITES ban in 1990, in all cities except Lagos. Even so a great number of items are still on sale. It may not be surprising that these items are not meant for the local market, and that all worked ivory is bought by diplomats, personnel from international organizations like the UN, military personnel and foreign tourists from Europe, America and the Far East. This would suggest that even if the African governments are too financially stretched to actively enforce the CITES ban, the onus should lie on the customs officials of the importing nations as well as on conservation bodies to continue to educate the general public. The expatriate workforce in many African countries could even be approached more directly to tell them about the effects of the trade in ivory on elephant populations, and of course equally important the consequences of purchasing other wildlife items like cat skins and rhino horn.

The book is well produced, and the data are set out consistently and clearly. I think few people will study every detail. The introductions and discussions are quite enlightening and helpful. The authors are to be commended for the thoroughness of their survey. I for one appreciate greatly that this time the results are not relegated to an unobtainable internal report but published and accessible to all who are interested.



Cairo is the main centre for carving and selling ivory items in North Africa. The raw ivory comes mostly from Sudan (photo: Esmond Martin).



In Ethiopia today, the main buyers of ivory commodities are foreign diplomats, French and Italian tourists, and Chinese and Korean businessmen and labourers (photo: Esmond Martin).