

Ivory Markets in the USA, by Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles

Drawings by Andrew Kamiti. Published by Care for the Wild International and Save the Elephants; 20 pages, 2008, 6 plates. ISBN 9966-9683-5-0

Review by Kees Rookmaaker

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This is the fifth report in a series of surveys depicting the status and trends of the elephant ivory markets around the world. The authors have already shown their commitment to conservation and documentation in many earlier publications. Esmond Martin has been researching the trade in endangered animal products since the mid-1960s, while Daniel Stiles has studied the ivory market and ivory carving since 1999.

The present survey was conducted between March 2006 and May 2007 in 16 selected localities in USA and one in Canada. Some of the salient findings were that the most ivory was for sale in New York, followed by San Francisco and Los Angeles, and that the USA has the second largest retail ivory market (after China Hong Kong) as determined by the number of items seen for sale (a total of 24,004 items in 657 outlets). The size of the market has, however, declined since 1989, with a reduction in the number of outlets as well as the number of craftsmen. The country now consumes less than a tonne of ivory annually, and there is said to be an adequate supply. The 2006/07 price of ivory was said to be between USD 154 and USD 346 per kg.

The USA has a good record in enforcing CITES regulations and has reported the largest number of seizures of illegal ivory in the world. In the period 1990–2005, the USA imported 3530 tusks and 2400 raw ivory pieces, as well as more than 40,000 worked ivory items. The latter should all have been antiques, but inspection of some of the pieces in the outlets suggests that several new pieces are for sale. The authors conclude that the ivory market in the USA has only a small detrimental effect on elephant populations due to the import of worked ivory for retail sale.

The report opens with essays which are worth reading, covering facts on the legal position of the ivory trade in the USA and the history of ivory manu-

facturing. It is said that two factories were established in the early 19th century, both in the Connecticut River Valley: Pratt, Read and Company in Deep River and Comstock, Cheney and Company in Ivoryton. They first made ivory combs, but soon started to make piano action components and keys. This business declined in the middle of the 20th century and essentially closed down in the 1980s. The report provides some fascinating insights in this early industry. It is said that in the 19th century most ivory was imported from Zanzibar and later also from Hong Kong. As neither of these countries have resident elephant populations, the real origin of the ivory is somewhat obscure.

The report is illustrated by a well-chosen series of photographs and engaging sketches by Andrew Kamiti. The captions are informative, but it would have been nice to see a little more detail. On page 39, for instance, there is a drawing of George Washington's dentures with natural teeth and ivory base, obviously preserved in one of the great American museums, but not readily identified in the report. Again, there is no index to help with quick access to the wealth of data. None of this takes away from the great value of this report, which covers a large geographic area with confidence and in detail. There is an incredible wealth of data, painstakingly obtained and carefully analysed.

This report, produced in A4 format in a soft cover, 120 pages in length, is again a tribute to the authors' knowledge and dedication. It is available (gratis) from the sponsors: Care for the Wild International and Save the Elephants, and at the time of writing it is available in PDF format for easy and free download on their web sites: <http://careforthewild.org> and <http://savetheelephants.org>. This is an easy and recommended way to obtain copies of these interesting, carefully researched and well-written documents. Highly recommended.