

## DONOR UPDATES

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### The Elephant Crisis Fund

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The global nature of the ivory crisis requires a sustained, multi-pronged and global response from a coalition of effective leaders, NGOs, institutions, media and governments. This coalition has come together, and is working to implement a three-pillared strategy to end the crisis: anti-poaching efforts to stop the killing of elephants; anti-trafficking projects to prevent ivory from reaching markets; and demand-reduction efforts that make the trade in ivory products ultimately obsolete.

Human greed led to this catastrophe, but human generosity can turn it around. Recognising the need for catalytic, fast-moving conservation financing for those organisations at the frontline of elephant conservation across Africa, Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network, in partnership with the Leonardo

DiCaprio Foundation, created the Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) to galvanise that generosity and channel it to the most effective, strategic and catalytic projects that can address the ivory crisis. The Elephant Crisis Fund is directed by Chris Thouless, a well-respected scientist with strong conservation experience from across Africa, who is supported by a small team of experienced personnel. The Elephant Crisis Fund currently serves 35 partners with active projects, many of whom are working in some of the most dangerous and remote parts of Africa from Mali to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

One hundred percent of funds raised by the ECF are used to support on-the-ground programmes that save elephants—not a single cent goes to administrative fees or overheads. The ECF deploys funds with a minimum of bureaucracy, sometimes within 24 hours in response to a crisis, and can bridge funding gaps to keep boots on the ground. Organisations able to make the biggest impact are supported regardless of whether they are tiny, deeply embedded field outfits or larger multinational institutions.

In the last four years the ECF has disbursed nearly \$15M to 197 projects in 32 countries implemented by more than 60 partner organisations—mostly NGOs working closely with national wildlife and law enforcement agencies. These partners are playing a critical role in stemming the poaching, trafficking and demand for ivory and in helping to



Photo © Jane Wynyard/Save The Elephants

create a sustainable future for wild elephants and their ecosystems across Africa.

Challenges, however, still remain. The forests of Central Africa have been largely emptied of elephants, and the few remaining strongholds are under intense pressure. New trafficking routes are opening up with networks moving their operations in response to increasingly effective enforcement.

Although elephants are still being rapidly depleted in poaching hotspots across the continent, 2017 was dominated by the overwhelmingly positive new leadership from China. While once pro-ivory trade, China has become a leading voice calling for the trade in ivory to be banned. The key now is to monitor how well the ban will be enforced to keep the trade from moving deep underground and across China's borders into areas like Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar.

## **Protecting the lives of elephants**

We are seeing solid results from cost-effective, intelligence driven approaches to anti-poaching and law enforcement efforts. Poaching in Garamba (NP) in the Democratic Republic of Congo—the site of a killing field for both pachyderms and rangers in recent years—has been almost halved. One of Nigeria's last surviving elephant populations—in Yankari National Park—has not lost any elephants to poaching for almost three years.

Since its inception, the ECF has funded 80 anti-poaching projects and invested in patrol bases, ranger training, vehicles, establishment of rapid reaction units, aerial patrols, new tracking and sensing technologies, command and control post upgrades, communications infrastructure, informer networks and intelligence programs to guide anti-poaching units, among other activities.

The ECF's anti-poaching priorities are focused on supporting cost-effective intelligence-driven approaches to law enforcement, particularly in elephant strongholds under threat. These include the key elephant populations of Garamba NP (DRC), Niassa National Game Reserve (Mozambique), and Odzala-Kokoua NP (Congo); the Luangwa ecosystem (Zambia); and the elephants of Gabon and Tanzania. The Elephant

Crisis Fund and partners are rolling out the concept of elephant tracking for security and its integration with Vulcan Inc.'s Domain Awareness System, and we will pursue its scaling this year to more protected areas across the continent.

## **Stopping the trafficking of ivory**

The ECF has supported a total of 74 anti-trafficking projects including the funding of effective approaches such as sniffer dogs, investigations into ivory seizures, development of intelligence capacity and investigations into organised crime networks—all leading to arrests and convictions of increasingly high-level traffickers. Yet, many tons of ivory continue to move across the continent and into other markets, particularly in Asia.

Legal reform and training are key to turning arrests into meaningful convictions. We have supported the Lilongwe Wildlife Trust in Malawi to implement courtroom monitoring work, following a model developed in Kenya by ECF grantee WildlifeDirect, and have seen conviction rates in Malawi rise from almost zero to 84%. The Natural Resource Conservation Network's collaboration with the Uganda Wildlife Authority led to further arrests of wildlife traffickers in Uganda. Such collaboration between partners also allows traffickers to be traced across borders. New work with international law enforcement agencies is generating new resources and new avenues to ensure high-level traffickers, who had previously appeared untouchable, face justice.

Despite the ongoing challenges in effectively prosecuting suspected trafficker Feisal Ali Mohammed in Kenya, the trial, together with the deportation of the Akasha brothers in January 2017, has caused several major East African traffickers to divert some ivory flows to countries not previously prominent in the trade. Once unheard of, the links between East and West African trafficking networks are growing, creating new flows of ivory across the continent.

Seeking greater security for both teams and data is a high priority especially following the murder of conservationist Wayne Lotter last year in Tanzania in what appears to have been a targeted hit.

As the traffickers are being displaced and operating widely there is an increasing need to enhance coordination between investigating agencies both in the non-profit and government sectors, and to share intelligence across borders and carry out joint investigations.

## Ending the Demand for Ivory

China's commitment to ban all domestic ivory trade represents perhaps the greatest cause of hope for elephants. The closure of the Chinese domestic ivory market took full effect at the end of 2017. The Natural Resources Defense Council, an ECF grantee, has been providing advice to the Chinese government behind the scenes on the practical steps required in implementing the ban.

A report published by Save the Elephants in February 2017 showed that the price of ivory in markets across China had dropped by two-thirds from \$2,100 per kg in early 2014 to \$730 per kg in 2017, an encouraging sign that demand was declining.

While China's actions are truly signs for hope, the ECF must double down to ensure that the China ban is complete, and that demand does not simply flow over China's borders into neighbouring nations such as Hong Kong, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar where there is little or no law enforcement.

Since its inception, the ECF has supported a total of 25 demand-reduction projects. In 2017, it funded a campaign by WildAid affiliate, Change, to encourage the Vietnamese government to control its ivory markets, and the fund is planning to support similar activities in other south-east Asian countries.

The same year, ECF consultants, Lucy Vigne and the late Esmond Martin, found that Laos is now the world's fastest growing ivory market. Vientiane, Laos' capital, had the most outlets and ivory items seen for sale, but other hotspots are springing up throughout the country. This report, published in late 2017, attracted attention at the 69<sup>th</sup> CITES Standing Committee meeting in Geneva in November 2017 where parties sought to hold Laos accountable for illegal trade in ivory and other wildlife parts occurring within its borders (See review on pages 119-122).

Just this year, the Hong Kong Legislature Assembly voted to close down its domestic market but this will not take place for another five years. ECF grantees WWF Hong Kong and WildAid successfully lobbied the legislators to ensure smooth passage of the bill against a strong rear-guard action by ivory traders.

## The Road Ahead

While there have been many successes, the future for Africa's elephants remains uncertain with much ivory continuing to move across the continent and vulnerable elephant populations still under assault. There is still much more to be done, particularly for the beleaguered populations of forest elephants.

Governments need to recognise that wildlife crime is increasingly organized by sophisticated and ruthless international networks, and when illegal ivory is seized, this should be seen as an opportunity for serious investigation rather than the seizure being an end in itself. We need to encourage cooperation between law enforcement agencies within and between countries, between donors and between support NGOs. Only by working together can we hope to bring an end to the elephant poaching crisis.

For more information about the ECF, including a full list of partners, visit [www.elephantcrisisfund.org](http://www.elephantcrisisfund.org).