
NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Egyptian Government Seizes Illegal Ivory Consignments

Esmond Martin

PO Box 15510, Nairobi, Kenya

Egypt has one of the largest retail ivory markets in Africa with over 21,000 items displayed in Cairo, Luxor and Aswan in 1998. Raw tusks are still being illegally imported into the country, mostly originating from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Craftsmen in the Cairo area presently make a variety of ivory items such as Pharaohs, wild animals and jewellery. The commercial ivory trade is illegal as Egypt is a party to CITES, which bans the international ivory trade, and the Egyptian government has legislation prohibiting the domestic sale of ivory items within the country (Martin, 2000).

According to the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) managed by TRAFFIC, the Egyptian government has not reported a single ivory seizure from 1989 to 1999 (Milliken and Sangalakula, 2000). From September 1999 to early April 2000, however, the Egyptian authorities have made nine separate seizures of worked and raw ivory from traders and tourists leaving the country (see Table 1.). The largest by far was the 79 tusks weighing 173 kg which were confiscated from an Egyptian trader in Aswan. According to the trader, this raw ivory came

from "Sudan and other countries". Other information also confirms that ivory tusks are still being imported into southern Egypt from Sudan, the source for centuries.

For the last few years the CITES Standing Committee and individual conservationists have strongly criticized Egypt for allowing this illicit ivory trade to continue. From the latter part of 1999 Egyptian authorities have at last taken action by arresting offenders, for which they should be congratulated. So far, almost no action has been taken, however, towards eliminating the many thousands of ivory items offered for retail sale in the many souvenir shops. The Egyptian government needs also to take action on this matter.

REFERENCES

- Martin, E. (2000) The present day Egyptian ivory trade. *Oryx* 34(2), 101-108.
- Milliken, T. and Sangalakula, L. (2000) A report on the status of the Elephant Trade Information System to the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties, CITES, Doc. 11.31.1 Annex 5.

Table 1. Ivory seizures within Egypt between September 1999 and April 2000.

Date of seizure	Date of report	Nationality of offender	Numbers of raw and worked ivory pieces	Weight [kg]
09.9.1999	26.3.2000	Egyptian	2	6
25.9.1999	26.3.2000	Egyptian	29	65
03.1.2000	26.3.2000	American	4	10
26.1.2000	26.3.2000	French	2	?
08.2.2000	26.3.2000	Turkish	7	30
13.2.2000	26.3.2000	Saudi Arabian	35	35
28.3.2000	01.4.2000	Egyptian	79	173
31.3.2000	01.4.2000	Egyptian	2	?
01.4.2000	03.4.2000	Turkish	2	8
Total			162	327

Source: Egyptian Management Authority

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Photo 1. These three statues are typical of Egyptian carvings today.

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Photo 2. Almost all ivory craftsmen in Egypt today work in the Cairo area.