

Seized ivory to undergo DNA tests to track trade

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Seized ivory tusks are displayed during a Hong Kong Customs press conference on January 4, 2013. Countries making large seizures of illegal ivory will be required to conduct DNA tests to determine their origin under new anti-trafficking measures.

Countries making large seizures of illegal ivory will be required to conduct DNA tests to determine their origin under new anti-trafficking measures adopted on Wednesday.

The agreement at a major wildlife conservation conference in Bangkok follows a surge in poaching of the African elephant to the worst levels since international ivory trade was banned in 1989.

Conservationists say origin, transit and consumer countries are all struggling to tackle [criminal gangs](#) involved in the lucrative trade.

In order to better track the illicit commerce, a nation that makes a seizure of at least 500 kilos of ivory should take samples and analyse them within 90 days, according to a resolution adopted by 178 member countries of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Modern laboratories can determine "fairly exactly where the elephant has been killed", according to Peter Pueschel of the conservation group International Fund for Animal Welfare.

The tests will help detect "the middlemen and the kingpin behind the crimes", and to locate poaching hotspots to enable increased efforts to protect those elephants still alive, he said.

The agreement—under which all major seizures made within the past 24 months should also undergo [DNA analysis](#) where possible—was hailed as a "major success" by Kenya.

"Ivory that has been seized from Africa—whether it is in Zimbabwe (or) in Malaysia—we'll be able to trace the origin of ivory," said Kenyan delegate Patrick Omondi.

[Illicit trade](#) in ivory has doubled since 2007 and more than tripled over the past 15 years, according to wildlife groups, which estimate that only about 420,000 to 650,000 elephants remain in Africa.

Conservationists fear that 2012 was an even deadlier year than 2011, when an estimated 25,000 [African elephants](#) were killed.

In Thailand, a top market, criminals exploit legal trade in tusks from domesticated [Asian elephants](#) to sell illicit stocks of African ivory.

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