

C.Africa elephant population down 62% in 10 years

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A Kenya Wildlife Services ranger stands guard in front of an illegal ivory stockpile in Nairobi on July 20, 2011. Poaching on an "industrial" scale has slashed the elephant population in the countries of central Africa by nearly two-thirds, a group of international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) said on Friday.

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"A recent study shows that the population of forest elephants has dropped by almost two-thirds or 62 percent in the past 10 years, victims of large-scale ivory poaching," the group of eight NGOs said in a statement.

"The situation is dramatic and worrying. It's very dangerous," Jerome Mokoko, assistant director of the [Wildlife Conservation Society](#), told reporters at a news conference in Brazzaville.

"Nearly 5,000 elephants have been lost in the northern zone of Congo between 2009 and 2011," said Mokoko.

He added there were 80,000 elephants in the Central African Republic just 30 years ago but their number has been reduced to just a few thousand.

"The [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) alone is home to 70 percent of the [elephant population](#) of central Africa. But now there are only between 7,000 and 10,000 elephants in the DRC," Mokoko said.

Jules Caron, head of communications for the [World Wildlife Fund](#) in [central Africa](#), said the elephant poaching situation had changed "dramatically."

"We are no longer talking about small-scale poaching but poaching on an industrial scale, all run by highly organised and well-armed gangs of international criminals," added Caron.

The NGOs said poachers were seizing on weapons, especially Kalashnikov rifles that have become widespread due to several civil wars flaring in the region.

"The [ivory trade](#) begins and ends in south-east Asia, notably China and Thailand, respectively the world's biggest consumer and the world's biggest legal ivory market," Caron told AFP.

He called on heads of state to "take on the fight against poaching, criminal activity surrounding animal parts and illegal trade in wild species."

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