

# Kenya to toughen poaching sentences to save elephants

April 6 2013, by Peter Martell

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An elephant at the Amboseli game reserve in Kenya on December 30, 2012. Kenya plans to bolster current lenient sentences for convicted wildlife poachers or ivory smugglers in a bid to stamp out a spike in elephant killings, the government said.

Kenya plans to bolster current lenient sentences for convicted wildlife poachers or ivory smugglers in a bid to stamp out a spike in elephant killings, the government said on Saturday.

"We intend to fight poachers at all levels to save our elephants," government spokesman Muthui Kariuki said in a statement.

A major obstacle to this is that Kenyan courts are currently limited in their powers to jail or fine those convicted of [wildlife](#) crimes, he said.

"One of the major setbacks are lenient penalties and sentencing for [wildlife crime](#) by the courts," he said.

"The government is concerned about this and has facilitated the process of reviewing the wildlife law and policy with a view to having more deterrent penalties and jail terms."

Poaching has recently risen sharply in east Africa, with whole [herds](#) of elephants massacred for their ivory. [Rhinos](#) have also been targeted.

Passing tougher wildlife laws will be made a priority for Kenya's parliament, elected last month but which has yet to begin business.

"We look forward to... parliament giving priority to passing of a new wildlife law and policy," Kariuki added.



An elephant skeleton minus its tusks is pictured in Kora National Park, Kenya on January 29, 2013. Kenya plans to bolster current lenient sentences for convicted wildlife poachers or ivory smugglers in a bid to stamp out a spike in elephant killings, the government said.

Kenya's current wildlife act caps punishment for the most serious wildlife crimes at a maximum fine of 40,000 Kenyan shillings (470 dollars, 365 euros), and a possible jail term of up to 10 years.

Last month, a Chinese smuggler caught in Kenya with a haul of ivory was fined less than a dollar (euro) a piece.

The [smuggler](#), who was arrested carrying 439 pieces of worked ivory while in transit in Nairobi as he travelled from the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#) to Hong Kong, was fined \$350 (270 euros) and was then set free.

Such fines pose little if any [deterrence](#), with experts suggesting a kilogramme of ivory has an estimated black market value of some \$2,500.

Last year poachers slaughtered 384 elephants in Kenya, up from 289 in 2011, according to official figures, from a total population of around 35,000. This year, poachers have already shot dead 74.

Tourism is one of Kenya's most important foreign currency earners.

In addition, a thousand new wildlife officers "will soon be recruited to beef up the ranger force" as part of strengthening operations "with a view to stamping out the poaching menace", Kariuki added.

The illegal ivory trade is mostly fuelled by demand in Asia and the Middle East, where elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns are used to make ornaments and in traditional medicine.

Trade in elephant ivory, with rare exceptions, has been outlawed since 1989 after elephant populations in Africa dwindled from millions in the mid-20th century to some 600,000 by the end of the 1980s.

Africa is now home to an estimated 472,000 elephants, whose survival is threatened by poaching as well as a rising human population that is encroaching on their habitat.

Kenya is also a transit point for ivory smuggled from across the region.

In January, officials in the Kenyan port city of Mombasa seized more than two tonnes of [ivory](#), which had reportedly come from Tanzania and was destined for Indonesia.

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