

Africa risks losing 20 percent of elephants in 10 years, study says

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Africa could lose 20 percent of its elephant population in a decade if current poaching levels are not slowed, animal conservation groups warned Monday.

An estimated 22,000 elephants were illegally killed across the continent last year, as poaching reached "unacceptably elevated levels," said a joint

statement by CITES, TRAFFIC and IUCN.

"If poaching rates are sustained at current levels, Africa is likely to lose a fifth of its elephants in the next ten years," the statement said.

The study was released as experts and ministers met in Botswana Monday to look at ways to stamp out the elephant slaughter, which is fuelled by a growing demand for ivory in Asia.

"We continue to face a critical situation," said John E. Scanlon, secretary general of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

"Current elephant poaching in Africa remains far too high, and could soon lead to local extinctions if the present killing rates continue," he said.

Scanlon described the situation in central Africa, where the estimated poaching rate is twice the continental average, as "particularly acute".

There are around half a million elephants left in Africa compared with 1.2 million in 1980 and 10 million in 1900.



Kenyan rangers inspect ivory tusks at Mombasa Port on August 21, 2013

Researchers believe that poverty and weak governance in African countries harbouring elephants are the driving forces behind a spike in elephant poaching.

Elephants are killed for their tusks that are used to make prized ornaments.

Ivory trade is banned under the CITES, yet illegal ivory trade is estimated to be worth up to \$10 billion a year.

The price of ivory on the black market shot up tenfold in the past decade to more than \$2,000 per kilogramme. On average, an adult elephant tusk can weigh 20 kg (44 pounds), according to experts.

In the past 13 years, the quantities of ivory traded have steadily shot up, according to Tom Milliken, an [ivory trade](#) expert with the wildlife monitoring agency TRAFFIC.

"2013 already represents a 20% increase over the previous peak year in 2011; we're hugely concerned," said Milliken.

In recent years ivory trafficking routes appear to be shifting from the traditional West and central African seaports to east Africa with Kenya and Tanzania as the exit points.

Most of the ivory ends up in Thailand and China.

The group meeting in Botswana is expected to adopt a pact that will commit signatories, including the biggest ivory markets such as China, to demonstrate political will at the highest level in the fight against [poaching](#) and ivory trafficking.

African ministers and experts meet from Monday in Botswana to find ways to curb a spike in the killing of [elephants](#) for [ivory](#). Ali Kaka, from the International Union for Conservation of Nature, says action is urgently needed to prevent extinction.

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