

New data shows continued decline of African forest elephants

February 12 2014



New data from the field in Central Africa shows that between 2002 and 2013, 65 percent of forest elephants were killed. They are being poached, for their ivory, at a shocking 9 percent per year. Credit: Andrea Turkalo/WCS

New data from the field in Central Africa shows that between 2002 and 2013, 65 percent of forest elephants were killed. They are being poached, for their ivory, at a shocking 9 percent per year.

This new data marks an update to an earlier paper in the online journal *PLOS ONE* on the status of forest elephants across Central Africa, [published by the same scientists](#). Many organisations collaborated in the study which covered 80 sites, in five countries, over the twelve years of data collection.

The earlier paper, published in 2013, already had shown a decline of 62 percent of the population between 2002 and 2011—to less than 10 percent of its potential historical size, and that elephants occupied only a quarter of the forests where they once roamed.

The update, released at the United for Wildlife symposium today in London, was made by adding new data from 2012 and 2013 and using the same analysis methods as before.

"These new numbers showing the continuing decline of the African forest elephant are the exact reason why there is a sense of urgency at the United for Wildlife trafficking symposium in London this week," said Dr. John Robinson, WCS Chief Conservation Officer and Executive Vice President of Conservation and Science. "The solutions we are discussing in London this week and the commitments we are making cannot fail or the African forest elephant will blink out in our lifetime. United for Wildlife, which is headed by The Duke of Cambridge, is determined to work together to turn back these numbers."

Conservationists gathered at the United for Wildlife symposium – "International Wildlife Trafficking: Solutions to a Global Crisis" are discussing ways to protect [wildlife](#) and combat trade.

Said WCS's Dr. Fiona Maisels, one of the researchers releasing the new numbers and a co-author of the landmark paper: "At least a couple of hundred thousand forest elephants were lost between 2002-2013 to the tune of at least sixty a day, or one every twenty minutes, day and night.

By the time you eat breakfast, another elephant has been slaughtered to produce trinkets for the ivory market."

The results show that the relatively small nation of Gabon has the majority (almost 60 percent) of the remaining forest elephants. Historically, the enormous Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) would have held the largest number of forest elephants. "The current number and distribution of elephants is mind-boggling when compared to what it should be," said WCS's Dr. Samantha Strindberg, one of the co-authors. "About 95 percent of the forests of DRC are almost empty of elephants".

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: New data shows continued decline of African forest elephants (2014, February 12) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-decline-african-forest-elephants.html>

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