

Activists: Decline of elephants in Tanzania is catastrophic (Update)

June 2 2015, byTom Odula



In this file photo taken Friday, Jan. 16, 2015, African elephants interact in Tarangire National Park on the outskirts of Arusha, northern Tanzania. The sharp decline of the elephant population in Tanzania, most likely due to poaching, is catastrophic, a wildlife conservation group said Tuesday, June 2, 2015. The Tanzanian government on Monday estimated that 65,721 elephants have died in the country in the last five years. The report showed the number of Tanzanian elephants plummeting from an estimated 109,051 in 2009 to 43,330 in 2014. (AP Photo/Mosa'ab Elshamy, File)

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Steve Broad, the executive directors of wildlife conservation group TRAFFIC, said it is incredible that poaching on such an industrial scale had not been identified and addressed.

The statistics back concerns by TRAFFIC in a 2013 report that the Tanzanian ports of Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar have become main exit points for vast amounts of ivory, the group said in a statement.

According to the conservation group, at least 45 tons of ivory have flowed from Tanzania to international markets in Asia since 2009.

It said a breakdown across the country showed some smaller elephant populations had increased, notably that in the famed Serengeti region, which rose from 3,068 to 6,087 animals. However, beyond the most heavily visited tourist locations, elephant numbers were significantly down.

Of particular concern is the Ruaha-Rungwa ecosystem, where only 8,272 elephants remained in 2014, compared to 34,664 in 2009, according to government figures, the statement said.

"Tanzania has been hemorrhaging ivory with Ruaha-Rungwa the apparent epicenter and nobody seems to have raised the alarm," Broad said, and urged the government to take action to bring the situation under

control.

The Tanzanian government says it has added an additional 1,000 rangers to protect wildlife, but Broad said "there is a real risk that it could be a case of too little too late for some elephant populations."

In February China imposed a one-year ban on ivory imports that took immediate effect amid criticism that its citizens' huge appetite for ivory has fueled poaching that threatens the existence of African elephants.

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