

The Third Annual World Elephant Day: August 12, 2014

World Elephant Day has arrived! This is a special day to celebrate and honor elephants around the world, our achievements to protect them, and our hope for their future.

Elephant conservation continues to face complex challenges. We lost two of the world's most iconic bull elephants this year, Satao and Mountain Bull, who were slaughtered for their magnificent tusks. The demand for ivory is higher than ever, with China being the number one consumer of ivory products. It has been noted, however, that ivory consumption is an issue of education – many customers are simply unaware that elephants are killed for their tusks. Educating Chinese consumers and continuing to spread awareness about this reality is key to the ultimate salvation of elephants.

In the wake of these challenges we believe it is important to highlight some of the successes that have been attained by numerous organizations and individuals around the world, who are working hard to save elephants in the wild and in captivity. These include significant conservation efforts, new legislation, and growing support from the concerned public. What follows are just some of the highlights from this past year. We apologize for not being able to list more of the milestones attained. We certainly welcome information about other initiatives and successes to add to this update.

Milestones

- The U.S. government formed the Advisory Council on Wildlife Trafficking to advise on national strategies to combat wildlife trafficking. The Clinton Global Initiative announced an \$80 million Commitment to Action to stop the killing, the trafficking, and the demand for ivory, with support from NGOs, world governments, and concerned citizens.
- The International March for Elephants to heighten awareness about the elephants' plight was held October 4, 2013, in cities around the world as part of *iworry*, a campaign of The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. Forty-two cities – including London, New York, Bangkok, Arusha, and Cape Town – and 20,000 people took part in *iworry* and associated marches.*

**iworry* will be marking the anniversary of the first International March for Elephants by supporting global efforts to protect elephants and rhinos on World Animal Day, October 4, 2014. The “Global March for Elephants and Rhinos” grew out of the International March for Elephants, and has developed significantly into a movement that will see people marching for elephants and rhinos in more than 110 cities around the world on October 4 this year, with many organizations hosting events, such as The Lawrence Anthony Earth Organization March in Durban, South Africa. This World Elephant Day, sign up for a march near you: www.facebook.com/March4Elephants.

- The anti-poaching campaign S.A.F.E. (Safeguarding A Future for Africa's Elephants) was launched by The Bodhi Tree Foundation. Designed to heighten awareness among the travel community, S.A.F.E. seeks to provide support to conservation initiatives on the ground.
- In January 2014, Hong Kong announced its decision to destroy 28 tons of ivory over the next two years. China also crushed six tons of tusks and ivory ornaments, and in February, the U.S. government crushed six tons of contraband ivory. Kenya enacted stronger anti-poaching laws with stiffer sentences. The English government hosted an international conference on illegal wildlife trade, and Prince William, David Beckham, and NBA star Yao Ming teamed up to make a PSA about wildlife poaching.
- In April 2014, the U.S. introduced a bill that would ban the use of animals in traveling circuses, joining countries with similar legislation like Austria, Belgium, Greece, India, Bolivia, Colombia, Great Britain, and Panama. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also banned the import of "trophy" ivory from Zimbabwe and Tanzania. Hong Kong retailers such as Wing On Department Store, Yue Hwa Chinese Products Emporium, and Chinese Arts & Crafts (HK) Ltd. announced they have stopped selling ivory.
- June 2014 saw Thailand, a transit nation for ivory and a consumer of it, announce a plan to destroy its stockpile of illegal ivory, including 6 tons of whole tusks. CITES has given Thailand until March 2015 to act on closing the domestic ivory market, or it will face trade sanctions and therefore significant economic losses.
- Also in June, New York and New Jersey passed landmark legislation to ban the sale and purchase of elephant ivory and rhino horn – and last week, New Jersey became the first state to sign it into law. Today, on World Elephant Day, New York's governor signed their bill into law. We hope others will follow.

All of these steps are important, but the Great Elephant Census is key to providing a more accurate estimate of just how many African elephants remain. Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen is underwriting a survey of Africa's elephants to calculate how many actually remain, where they are found, what threats they face, and whether their total population numbers are in fact increasing or decreasing. Botswana-based Elephants Without Borders will carry out the Great Elephant Census, which will cover 13 countries and is estimated to take two years to complete, at a cost of around \$8 million. Without this information, it is difficult to determine the precise rate at which elephants are approaching extinction. The estimates vary. According to a June 2014 report by CITES, 20 percent of Africa's elephants may be killed in the next ten years if poaching continues at current levels. Others believe that all African elephants may be extinct in the wild by 2025. Knowledge is crucial to acting quickly, intelligently, and effectively to save the elephants.

Asian Elephants

Asian elephants are even closer to extinction – their numbers have declined by a staggering **90 percent** over the last hundred years. Poaching is an issue for Asian elephants, found in 13 countries in Asia, but the biggest problem for them is habitat loss. Human encroachment and loss of forest cover continue to fragment the remaining elephant populations, decreasing their chances of survival, and causing human-elephant conflict. These escalating encounters lead to both human and elephant casualties, and are mainly driven by habitat loss. Human fatalities and the destruction of crops impact villages, especially in regions of India. Factors such as the continuing development of palm oil plantations, like those in Borneo, an increase in mining and agricultural activities, and illegal logging all exacerbate these conflicts.



Asian elephants have held a major role in Asian culture for thousands of years. Their historical use in captivity creates complexities for their conservation. In early times they were used in warfare, and up to present times they have been essential in the development of transportation and logging. In recent years this demand has declined, which has challenged captive elephants and their mahouts to find new livelihoods. Tourism and other forms of entertainment have become their only option. Over the past year in Myanmar, elephants once used for logging are now largely out of work. Myanmar has the second largest wild population of Asian elephants left in the world, second to India. In Sri Lanka, Asian elephants are losing forest habitat due to expanding human settlements, increasing agriculture, and other development activities.

Geopolitical, social, and cultural factors further complicate matters concerning the treatment of wild Asian elephants. It is clear that some wild elephants are being illegally captured and sold into the lucrative tourism industry, and are being smuggled across borders. Some countries are attempting to combat this, with Thailand working to revise its legislation to protect wild elephants and enforce stronger registration protocols for captive elephants.

Nearly a third of the Asian elephant population is comprised of captive elephants. Some success has been achieved with the reintroduction of Asian elephants into the wild, through organizations such as the Elephant Reintroduction Foundation in Thailand. More attention needs to be drawn to the urgent plight of Asian elephants in all of their range countries, to reinforce current conservation efforts, curtail the destruction of their habitat, improve protections for wild elephants, and to reintroduce some back into the wild, where feasible, as well as taking better care of captive elephants.



Conservation Achievements and Public Outreach

In the field: Conservationists everywhere are working to mitigate human-elephant conflict. Successes include the beekeeping fence, developed by Dr. Lucy King of Save the Elephants, Kenya. These fences prevent elephants from trespassing into farmers' crops with the deterrent threat of a bee sting. Their use is spreading and it is hoped they may be employed with similar success in Asia.

Working with local communities to develop an integrated approach to elephant conservation has seen a great deal of success. The Mali Elephant Project, for example, facilitated elephant conservation with sustainable resource management based on community engagement and stabilization.

Education and outreach: Educational efforts, advocacy, and changing public opinion are all contributing to a growing cultural awareness that it is not okay to buy ivory. In June, the Wildlife Conservation Society was instrumental in persuading the popular TV show *Antiques Roadshow* to stop appraising ivory on the program. And celebrities continue to speak out on behalf of the elephants – recent additions include Meryl Streep, Billy Joel, Leonardo DiCaprio, Prince William, Ricky Gervais, Ian Somerhalder, and Audra McDonald.

Several films have been made recently that call attention to the elephants' plight. These include the 38-minute documentary *White Gold*, produced by Arne Glimcher, Ian and Tanya Saunders, and Bonnie Hlinomaz, directed by Simon Trevor, and narrated by Hillary Clinton. *White Gold* discusses the links between elephant poaching and organized crime/terrorist organizations. *Return to the Forest*, narrated by William Shatner, focuses on positive conservation work being done in Thailand, returning elephants back to protected forest. *Elephants Never Forget*, the upcoming feature film from the same filmmakers, Patricia Sims and Michael Clark, is about the story of a young man, his elephant, and the life they share together in Thailand, exploring the complexities and challenges of elephants in captivity. The National Geographic film for PBS, *Battle for the Elephants*, directed by John Heminway, features journalists Bryan Christy and Aidan Hartley, and their investigation into poaching and the ivory trade in Africa and China.

Law enforcement: Tightening the noose on illicit trade in wildlife just got easier with the recent expansion of WildLeaks in June. WildLeaks is a secure, online platform where whistleblowers can anonymously share with experts what they know about illegal wildlife activity. In its first three months of operation, WildLeaks garnered 24 serious leads and has instigated three formal investigations into the trafficking of contraband elephant ivory.



Hope for the Future

We have a lot to learn from elephants. They possess so many qualities that we strive for in ourselves, from intelligence to social behavior. But perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from elephants is how to show compassion. Most of the problems that elephants face are ultimately human problems. We show much compassion for the elephants, but maybe they can also teach us how to show compassion for each other. Indeed, we must learn this lesson if we are to have any hope of protecting the elephants, other wildlife, or our environment.

Last year we ended our update by wondering whether or not the elephants know that we are trying to help them. One well-known story that stands out as an example of the awareness they may have about us is also a reminder of just how extraordinary elephants are. Lawrence Anthony was a renowned conservationist who owned a 5,000-acre game reserve in Zululand, South Africa. One day he received a phone call. Would he adopt a herd of nine rogue elephants who otherwise would have to be shot? Although he didn't have any real experience with elephants, he hesitated for only a moment before saying yes. Over the course of their time together, he befriended the traumatized animals and succeeded in winning their friendship and their trust.

When he died of a heart attack at 62, the herd he had befriended (which had grown to two herds), travelled for twelve hours to his home to commemorate his passing. They stayed for two days, and then they returned from whence they had come.

Amid all the challenges we face with elephant conservation we believe it is inspiring to remember this story. It is important to understand that any action to help elephants, no matter how small it may seem to be, is not in vain. Imagine that the elephants in all likelihood could know of our efforts and be perhaps deeply grateful. Undoubtedly the world loves elephants and the world needs elephants. In all of our collective efforts to protect them and save them, we believe that we will succeed. We must not give up the fight.

Written by: Anne Dillon, Patricia Sims, Jesse Holth, Jean Shirk, and Michael Clark