

# African forest elephants face extinction from poaching and low birth rate

Aug. 31, 2016

**Extinction is racing toward the African forest elephant** much more quickly than previously thought, *The Guardian* reports. A new study shows that **poaching and habitat loss combined with the animal's sluggish reproductive rate have cut their numbers by 60% since 2002**. Female forest elephants don't begin to reproduce until they're 20 years old, and even then only have offspring every 5 or 6 years—that makes the species' population growth three times slower than savanna elephants. The study, published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, explains that even if poaching is completely halted, the iconic species would need 100 years to recover from the numbers lost in the past decade.

## More bad elephant news: Savanna elephant numbers plummet

Sep. 1, 2016

After news that **forest elephant numbers are taking a nosedive**, it has now surfaced that African savanna elephant populations have also plummeted by a third in just 7 years, NPR reports. In a study dubbed The Great Elephant Census, **researchers counted** the savanna elephant populations in 18 African countries. The resulting numbers were shocking: The elephant **population had declined by 144,000 animals** in a little less than a decade, according to a

study published in *PeerJ*, which reduces their total numbers to just over 350,000. Illegal poachers, who sell the elephants' ivory on the black market, majorly contribute to this decline.

## New report confirms grim outlook for elephants

By Matt McGrath  
Environment correspondent, Johannesburg  
25 September 2016



Image caption

The illegal trade in ivory has seen elephant numbers plummet

**Elephant populations in Africa have declined by around 111,000 over the past 10 years according to a new study.**

The **African Elephant Status report** says that poaching is the main driver of the fall, the worst losses in 25 years.

However the authors say that long-term issues such as the loss of habitat also pose a significant threat.

The report has been presented at the Cites meeting which is considering new proposals on elephant protection.

War on elephants - Alastair Leithead, Africa correspondent



#### Image caption

The growing demand for ivory in Asian markets means the illegal trade continues to threaten the future of elephants in Africa

Every year in Africa between 30,000 and 40,000 elephants are poached for their ivory, and it's thought there are only 400,000 left.

Even accounting for the newborns, this rate of killing calls into question whether these amazing creatures will still be around in a generation, especially as Africa's ever-increasing population is reducing the space for them.

Organised crime runs the ivory industry.

**Extract from The War on Elephants; article on how the very existence of Africa's elephants is threatened by poachers**

**More from Alastair:**

**Why elephants are seeking refuge in Botswana**

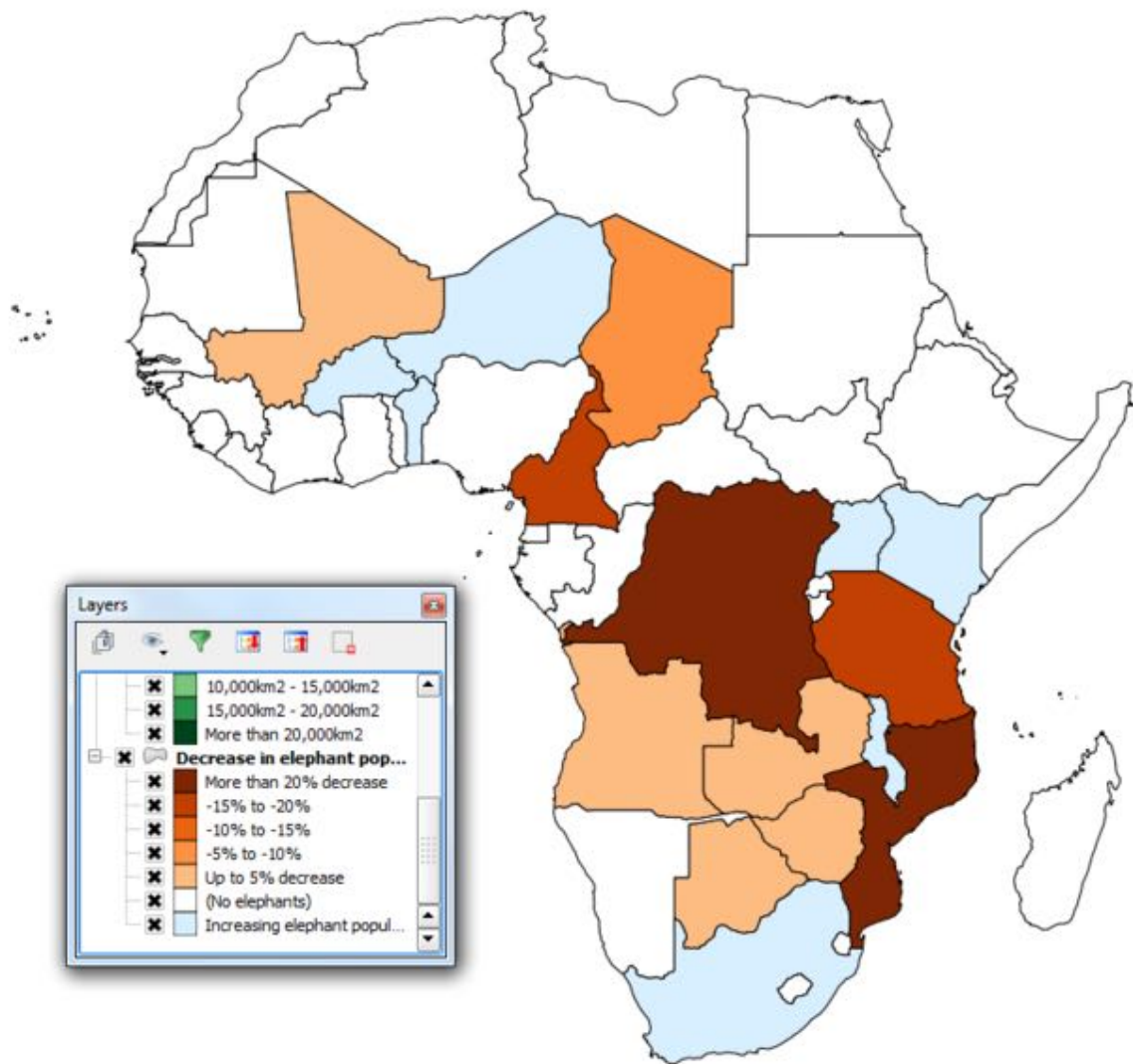
**Shocking reduction in Africa's elephant numbers**

#### Wide range of sources

Figures published earlier this year in the **Great Elephant Census** indicated that African elephant populations had declined by around 30% over the past seven years. This new study from conservation group IUCN incorporates this information but also uses data from elephant dung counts and individual observations amongst other sources.

The authors say the overall total for elephants in Africa is now around 415,000, although there may be an additional 117,000 to 135,000 in areas not systematically surveyed.

This represents a decline of some 111,000 from the report carried out in 2006.



### Image caption

Percentage change estimates are per year for 2010-2014, so total losses are three or four times the percentages indicated on the graphic

Poaching is the main driver of the drop. East Africa, the region most affected by killings for ivory, has experienced around a 50% reduction in numbers.

However it is not the only cause of concern to the authors.

"We are particularly concerned about major infrastructure projects that are cutting up the elephant ranges, this is a particular problem for road development in central and east Africa," said Dr Chris Thouless, one of the report's authors.

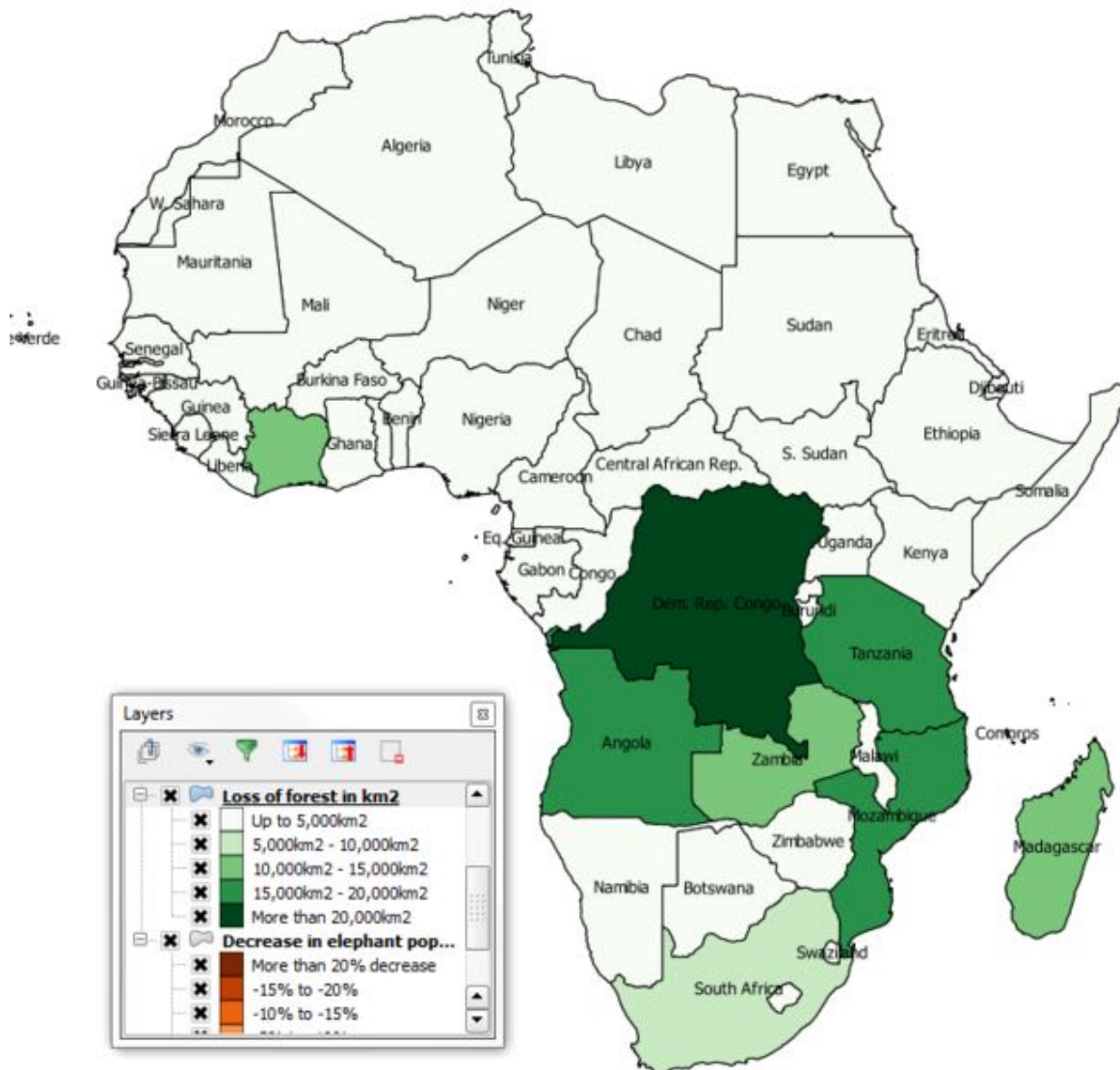
"These are all major issues that will have to be dealt with once the poaching crisis is over."

### Community conservation

While report highlights the losses there are also some gains.

Elephant populations in South Africa, Namibia and Uganda have all increased.

Elephant ranges have expanded in Kenya and Botswana, with community based conservation showing real success in Northern Kenya.



While these are positives, the overall picture is one of dramatic decline, fuelled by criminal activity that would decimate these giant creatures, if continued.

"Larger quantities of illegal ivory are leaving Africa than ever before," said Ginette Hemley from WWF.

"The transnational crime syndicates driving the slaughter must be dismantled, and consumer demand for ivory cannot persist if we hope to secure a safe future for elephants."

The report comes as the Cites meeting here in Johannesburg is **facing significant division on how to handle the poaching crisis.**

Talks on extra protections for elephants will begin on Monday with a number of countries led by Kenya seeking extra protection.

Others, including Namibia and Zimbabwe, are seeking to liberalise the safeguards and open up a trade in ivory. Another proposal here, which might garner more support, is aimed at ending all domestic markets in ivory. The meeting continues until 5 October.

# Deep divisions over elephants to dominate key species meeting

By Matt McGrath

Environment correspondent, Johannesburg

24 September 2016

**The world's biggest conference on species protection has opened in South Africa amid concern and division over the survival of elephants.**

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) will address proposals impacting more than 500 plants and animals.

But elephants are likely to top the bill with countries bitterly divided over the best way to protect the ponderous pachyderms.

The meeting lasts until 5 October.

## Poaching surge

Billed as the largest gathering in the 43-year history of the convention, the 17th **Conference of the Parties** (COP) will see more than 2,500 delegates from more than 180 countries come together in Johannesburg.

While there are proposals affecting lions, sharks, rhinos, pangolins and dozens of other species, the main focus will be on elephants.

There have been growing international concerns about the **surge in poaching for ivory that has seen elephant numbers plummet** by 30% in the past seven years. And while Cites Secretariat has argued that there has been a slowdown in the trend, some new figures released at the meeting cast doubt on this view.

The **Elephant Trade Information System** (ETIS) is the world's most comprehensive database on the illicit trade in elephant products. It is managed by Traffic, the wildlife monitoring network, on behalf of Cites.

Speaking to BBC News, Dr Richard Thomas from Traffic said that new information presented at this meeting suggested that what appeared to be a downturn in illegal ivory activities in 2014 might have been a false dawn.

"The indications were that the 2014 figure, it looked like there was a drop, now the 2015 data has been put in there for ivory it is certainly at the level it was in 2012/13 and that's very disheartening," he said.

"We don't know what it means in terms of poaching but it's likely to be a fairly simple equation, with high levels of ivory meaning high levels of poaching." At this meeting there are a number of proposals reflecting very different approaches to the elephant problem.

Namibia and Zimbabwe are seeking to liberalise the restrictions that see them prevented from selling ivory, even though the elephants in their countries are categorised as Appendix II, a lower level of protection that normally allows countries to trade in a species or its parts.

However, a counter proposal from a number of other African countries seeks to raise

all African elephants to Appendix I to ensure there is no legal loophole for any ivory trade.

## Legacy issues

Several conservation groups are backing this tougher stand.

"There is no greater protection for imperilled species from detrimental trade than an Appendix I listing," said Iris Ho from Humane Society International.

"A continued split-listing of the African elephant is akin to a declaration by Cites to open the ivory trade for business. The conservation legacy of Cites is at stake, and so is the survival of the African elephant."



### Image caption

Loss of habitat has also affected elephant numbers

Many have also taken issue with the Cites Secretariat, who have advised countries meeting here to reject the up-listing of all African elephants to Appendix I, arguing that it might provoke some nations to opt out of Cites altogether and resume an unsupervised trade.

"The secretariat has over-stepped its powers in trying to influence policy before a proposal has even been discussed," said Robert Hepworth, a former chair of the Cites Standing Committee and now an adviser to the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation.

There are other underlying factors that bring an added urgency to the discussions here on elephants.

Back in 2007 similar divisions on the issue of elephants ultimately forced a compromise at Cites, where a one-off sale of ivory was allowed in 2008 and all other proposals for sales were off limits until 2017.

"One of the parts of that deal in 2007 was that there would be a process devised, a mechanism would be established, to sell ivory and that hasn't happened," said Dr Thomas.

"The countries that signed up to it in the belief that they would be able to trade in the

future, they don't want to see that part of the deal fall through."