

# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND

## 2019 REPORT







# 2019 OVERVIEW

Front cover © David Giffin  
Inside cover © Ryan Wilkie





© Jane Wynyard

**In 2019, the situation for elephants has slowly improved in most of southern and eastern Africa, but they are still imperiled in other parts of their range, especially in the troubled regions of central and western Africa.**

Poaching has remained relatively low in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, and appears to have reduced in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Mozambique. **After years of heavy poaching in Niassa National Reserve in Mozambique there have been no elephants reported as killed for ivory since May 2018.** The situation for Africa's largest elephant population, in Botswana, is still unclear following reports of increased poaching in 2018 and controversy over the re-introduction of elephant sport hunting, but there is no evidence of a significant reduction in elephant numbers. Concern has been raised about low rainfall in southern Africa and the possibility that substantial numbers of elephants are dying of starvation. However, drought-related mortality is part of the natural cycle for elephants and sadly has to be accepted as part of the price for having locally high populations.



Forest elephants in a clearing in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo.  
© J.P. Sagette/Wildlife Conservation Society

The situation in Central Africa is much worse. It is less easy to know what is happening there, except in a few closely observed protected areas, because counting forest elephants is so difficult, and patrols seldom find poached carcasses. However, evidence from ivory seizures and from well monitored sites suggests that **poaching pressure is still severe, and poorly protected forest areas are losing large numbers of elephants. Funding for forest elephant protection is urgently needed**, but there has recently been an unexpected setback. The United States Department of the Interior has suspended funding through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for its Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment, which previously provided vital support for forest elephant conservation. The Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) is attempting to fill some of the funding gaps in the wake of this decision, as a crisis measure, though the ECF will not be able to provide continuous funding in the same way as the U.S. government.

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**There has been significant progress against ivory trafficking this year.** A series of arrests of major ivory traffickers has helped to disrupt their networks and made their members more cautious. These have included the arrest of Moazu Kromah in Uganda and his deportation to the United States by USFWS, the arrest of Amara Cherif in Senegal, the arrests of key traffickers in Zambia and Malawi, and a number of arrests and convictions by Chinese customs, prompted by preliminary investigations by the Environmental Investigation Agency. The USFWS case is



particularly noteworthy, since it includes trafficking in drugs and rhino horn as well as ivory, and the hearing of the case in the Southern District of New York means that these senior traffickers cannot bribe their way to freedom or to reduce their sentences.

These are important successes, but **large quantities of ivory are still being shipped from Africa to Asia, often in the same containers as pangolin scales.** A string of large ivory seizures in the first half of the year was followed by another huge seizure in July in Singapore of nine tonnes of ivory together with pangolin scales being shipped from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Because of the law enforcement clampdown in China, ivory mostly seems to be moving through Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, on its way to China rather than going directly. There is some evidence of an increase in Chinese tourists buying ivory in countries such as Cambodia, but it is not clear whether this accounts for a major part of the ongoing trade. One reason for these large-scale movements may be traffickers wishing to stockpile ivory in relatively 'safe' countries in Asia, rather than in Africa.



Ivory and pangolin scales seized by customs officials in Hong Kong in January 2019.  
© Alex Hafford



**Poaching has reduced  
in most of southern and  
eastern Africa.**





# SUCCESSSES

- Major ivory trafficking suspects have been arrested in several countries following investigations headed by USFWS, China Customs, and ECF partners.
- Four trafficking suspects have been arraigned in the Southern District of New York, increasing the chances of successful prosecution: one is on remand there, while another is awaiting extradition from Senegal, and two are still on the run.
- Arrests of trafficking suspects have challenged the apparent impunity of criminals trading in wildlife and may change perceptions of the risk to reward ratio.
- Poaching has reduced in most of southern and eastern Africa.
- In some Central and West African strongholds, poaching is under control, although the threat is ever present.
- China and several Southeast Asian countries have almost completely eliminated the open sale of ivory.

# CHALLENGES

- A number of elephant strongholds in Central African forests are in jeopardy as a result of the withdrawal of U.S. government funding.
- Ivory sales in most of Asia have gone underground, making them much more difficult to monitor and close down.
- The jihadist uprising in West Africa is exposing major elephant populations to increased threat.

# THE ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND

**The ongoing elephant poaching crisis in Africa is driven by a complex, international ivory trade that thrives on poverty, insecurity, organized crime, corruption, and greed. To tackle this critical issue head on, Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network created the Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF).**

The ECF works with a coalition of individuals, scientists, conservation organizations and governments to stop the killing of elephants, prevent ivory from reaching markets, and reduce the profitability of the trade in ivory products.

The ECF supports the best initiatives in need of funds regardless of where they come from. The organizations able to make the most impact, whether they are tiny local NGOs or larger multinational institutions, get our support. A team of experts works to ensure strategic and effective allocation of the funds generously provided by our donors.

The ECF is able to respond quickly and with minimal bureaucracy, deploying funds in as little as 24 hours when necessary. Uniquely, 100% of funds are used to support on-the-ground programs that save elephants—not a single cent goes to administrative fees or overhead.

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In just over six years, the ECF has deployed more than \$23 million to the best efforts to save elephants and end the ivory crisis, and is aiming to raise a total of \$50 million by 2023. With poaching, trafficking, and demand for ivory still at unsustainable levels, the ECF will not stop until the crisis has ended, and elephant populations across Africa are no longer under threat.



# 111,000



**reduction** in Africa's elephant population between 2007 and 2015

## 280

### Grants

issued by the  
ECF since 2013

## 78

### Organizations

have received grants  
from the ECF

## 37

### Countries

with ECF investments

### % of funding allocated to



**anti-poaching  
projects**



**anti-trafficking  
projects**



**demand reduction  
projects**

## \$23 million

granted to ECF partners

## 0%

of your donation going to  
administrative fees or overhead



## \$4.3 million

**granted in 2019**





# Anti-Poaching

## IMPROVED SITUATION IN PARTS OF AFRICA

Garamba National Park in northeast Democratic Republic of Congo has always been one of the most difficult parks to protect, because of its location close to the war-torn countries of South Sudan and the Central African Republic. African Parks has done a magnificent job of re-establishing control in Garamba after years of heavy poaching. The ECF has provided support to African Parks' anti-poaching efforts, focusing on improved intelligence. However, recent events have shown that constant vigilance is required. Only three elephants were killed in 2018 (down from about 100 in 2016), but in the second half of 2019 eight elephants were poached. They were shot by two groups of armed nomads which penetrated the park in search of ivory. In both cases, **intelligence, information from satellite collared elephants, and aerial surveillance were used to locate and deter the poachers.** While it was too late to prevent these deaths, this action helped to ensure that there were no further killings.

Until a few years ago, horsemen from Sudan, known as Janjaweed, were the scourge of elephant populations in the Sahelian region of Central and West Africa. Their incursions have become less frequent recently, but they were linked to **an attack on Binder Léré Faunal Reserve in western Chad** in August in which seven out of about 100 elephants in this population were killed. Gun fire was heard by local villagers; when rangers were called to investigate they found poachers shooting at elephants from horseback.

After an exchange of fire, the poachers escaped, despite the efforts of the pilot from Wings for Conservation, an ECF partner. However, shortly afterwards, six men were arrested, and 17 tusks recovered, suggesting that they had killed more than the seven elephants. The ECF has provided veterinary support to a USAID funded collaring operation for the scattered remnant elephant populations in western Chad, which should help to improve security there in the future.



Babile Elephant Sanctuary, in eastern Ethiopia, holds a unique and isolated elephant population, and is **under pressure because of inter-ethnic clashes**. In the face of a humanitarian crisis it is difficult for the government to focus on wildlife protection. The ECF has been supporting these elephants through Born Free Foundation for more than three years, but it is uncertain whether they can be saved. We are assessing what can be done for this highly endangered population.



© Peter Kenchington

Babile's Elephants are under intense threat. Illegal settlements and habitat destruction within the reserve threaten the future of this isolated elephant population. The invasive prickly pear (below) is a sign of overgrazing.





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## *Yankari Game Reserve in Nigeria is an unusual success story for West Africa.*

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The jihadist uprising in West Africa, which has threatened the desert elephants of Mali for more than five years, is spreading south and east: Burkina Faso is the latest country to come under assault. **There have been several attacks on outposts in Arly National Park**, part of the W-Arly-Pendjari trans-frontier complex, which holds the majority of West Africa's surviving elephants. The park management has been forced to move out and ECF partner Conservation Justice has been unable to deploy eco-guards in the area. We are looking at other ways to help this beleaguered elephant stronghold.

Yankari Game Reserve in Nigeria is an unusual success story for West Africa. The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been managing it for the past five years in collaboration with Bauchi State Government. **It has been four years since any elephants have been poached there**, and perhaps as a result of this, the elephants are now moving outside the reserve and coming into conflict with farmers on the periphery. They are still in danger of being shot, not so much for their ivory as in retaliation for damage they have caused to farms. WCS fitted six elephants with ECF-funded GPS satellite collars to find exactly where they are moving and how to enhance protection.

Six collars were successfully deployed in Yankari National Reserve in Nigeria in August and September 2019.  
© Wildlife Conservation Society Nigeria Program



**The situation for elephants has improved in 13 out of 37 range states since the ECF started.**







# Anti-Trafficking

AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR FOR ARRESTS OF TRAFFICKERS

This has been an extraordinary year for anti-trafficking efforts. A series of arrests has taken place across Africa including in Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, and Senegal. **This has targeted some of the most significant traffickers and has sent ripples across the continent.** Some of these arrests are the culmination of over four years of painstaking investigations, and the ECF has been there from the beginning. ECF funding has helped to mentor investigators, facilitated introductions and built trust between a strategic network of partners to make collaboration possible.

In Malawi, a multi-agency investigation into an alleged leading wildlife trafficking syndicate has resulted in the arrest of ten Chinese nationals and five Malawians. They have been charged with various wildlife and firearms offenses as well as financial crimes. This was allegedly a family-run criminal enterprise that had been operating globally and was **trafficking multiple species from Malawi with impunity for more than a decade.** Trials are now underway and two Chinese nationals have received Malawi's first ever custodial sentences for non-African nationals. We shall be following the rest of the cases with great interest.



In June 2019, Kobazu Kromah, an alleged ivory and narcotics trafficking kingpin, was expelled from Uganda to the U.S.. These pictures show him just before his departure from Uganda.

## WHY DOES A SUCCESSFUL INVESTIGATION TAKE YEARS?

Arresting high-level traffickers with enough evidence to secure a conviction is a major undertaking that requires patience and resources. Firstly, it requires engagement from a national government agency with a mandate to handle wildlife crimes. In some instances, this may just consist of a handful of trusted officers— a pocket of integrity—that needs support and insulation from corruption within the wider government structure. Working with some incredibly dedicated and courageous partner NGOs, the ECF has supported the development of these units by funding training and mentoring, supporting operational costs, and providing equipment. This support has laid the foundation for intelligence-led investigations, which are necessary to identify and pursue the senior traffickers who are driving the networks and are often protected through high-level connections. Local law enforcement agencies may need support in developing a suite of sophisticated intelligence techniques, to identify and gather evidence that is admissible in court.

Successful prosecutions rely on a compliant criminal justice pathway, careful evidence-gathering, a coherent chain of custody, and appropriate sentencing. This is a challenging area, not least because of the opportunity for corrupt actors to destroy a prosecution through a single point of interference. However, in spite of all these challenges, dedicated, long-term, and consistent work from the ECF's partners has culminated in some major achievements in 2019.

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The ground-breaking shift in anti-trafficking achievements this year has been facilitated by engagement of international law enforcement agencies, most notably USFWS, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and, in a separate investigation, the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of China Customs. International law enforcement agencies have enabled multi-jurisdictional investigations, knitting together all the groundwork that has already been carried out locally, resulting in an **unprecedented level of cooperation and coordination between NGOs and law enforcement agencies**. For example, international agencies can tackle senior traffickers who may otherwise slip through the cracks because of their high-level connections. Critically, they can also provide an additional layer of support for local law enforcement agencies and NGOs who may otherwise

find themselves targeted through internal corruption if they try to arrest 'untouchables'.

### **The Chinese Government's recent commitment to tackle the illegal ivory trade is starting to shift the trafficking landscape.**

The Anti-Smuggling Bureau of China Customs has launched a major crackdown, making it more difficult for ivory to enter China. This is also having an impact on how Chinese trafficking networks can operate outside China, shown by the apprehension and repatriation of a major ivory trafficker from Nigeria back to China in January this year. However, while the number of Chinese traffickers operating in Africa is decreasing, there has been a surge in Vietnamese traffickers. In addition, some of the criminal networks are diversifying into trafficking other species such as pangolins.

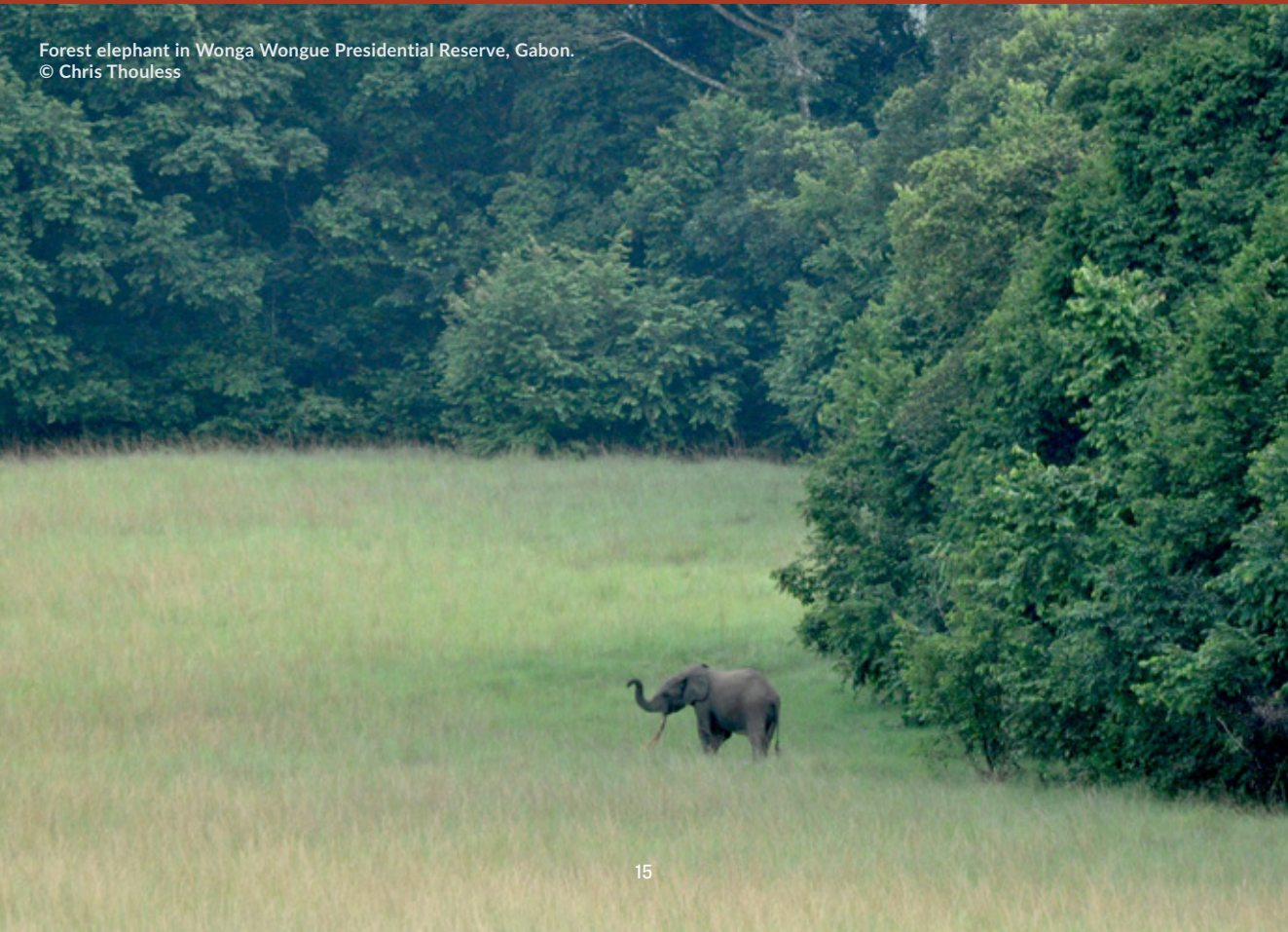


## FOREST ELEPHANTS: THE BIGGER PICTURE

A large proportion of Africa's remaining forest elephants live in Gabon. These elephants are under siege, pushed toward human settlements by ivory poachers who move across Gabon's porous borders. The forests in which these elephants live are threatened by illegal logging, and illegal gold mining has poisoned many of Gabon's river systems with mercury. A long-term research project has identified that even the trees in Gabon are under stress from the changing climate, and that warming and drying are at a critical level for forest survival. This is the front line, not only for elephants, but for an entire ecosystem. The ECF supports the National Agency of National Parks (ANPN) in Gabon to help them protect elephants, and secure the forests in which they live. In a recent two-month operation deep in the forest, ANPN pursued a notorious trafficking network responsible for killing hundreds of elephants, and seized 492 pounds of ivory. During the same operation, 120 illegal gold miners were arrested.

This law enforcement work is essential if forest elephants are to be protected, and the forests themselves must be safeguarded if these elephants are to have a future. Fortunately, there is a new cause for hope in protecting Gabon's forests. Norway will pay Gabon for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and degradation, and for the absorption of carbon dioxide by natural forests. If other African countries follow suit in identifying the value of their forests and securing them from poaching and logging, then there is genuine cause for hope for forest elephants and the ecosystems they inhabit.

Forest elephant in Wonga Wongue Presidential Reserve, Gabon.  
© Chris Thouless





Potential customers inspecting ivory products in a shop in Laos.  
© WWF Laos

# Demand Reduction

Demand reduction is a key component of the ECF's strategy, but with the banning of the domestic ivory market in China, our approach has evolved. Information from market surveys carried out by WWF indicates that an increasing share of ivory demand comes from 'die hard' buyers who are unlikely to be affected by appeals to emotion, and may be relatively immune to warnings about legal penalties. Chinese tourists visiting Southeast Asian countries are buying more ivory, particularly in Cambodia, but it is not clear whether this is a major contributor to the trade, or whether the majority of the ivory is still moving in bulk to China.

The ECF is continuing to fund demand reduction activities focused on Chinese tourists, but our primary focus is to **understand the dynamics of the underground trade** so that we can target funding towards key consumers in a way that is likely to change their behavior.

As charismatic animals which are critical to the health of Africa's ecosystems, elephants continue to receive international attention and the impact of generous support from donors is really starting to bear fruit this year. We still have a long way to go, but have learned a lot along the way, so we are using our experience to collaborate closely with other donors. **These collaborations will help ensure progress towards the goal of closing down the illegal ivory trade and help secure a future for elephants.**

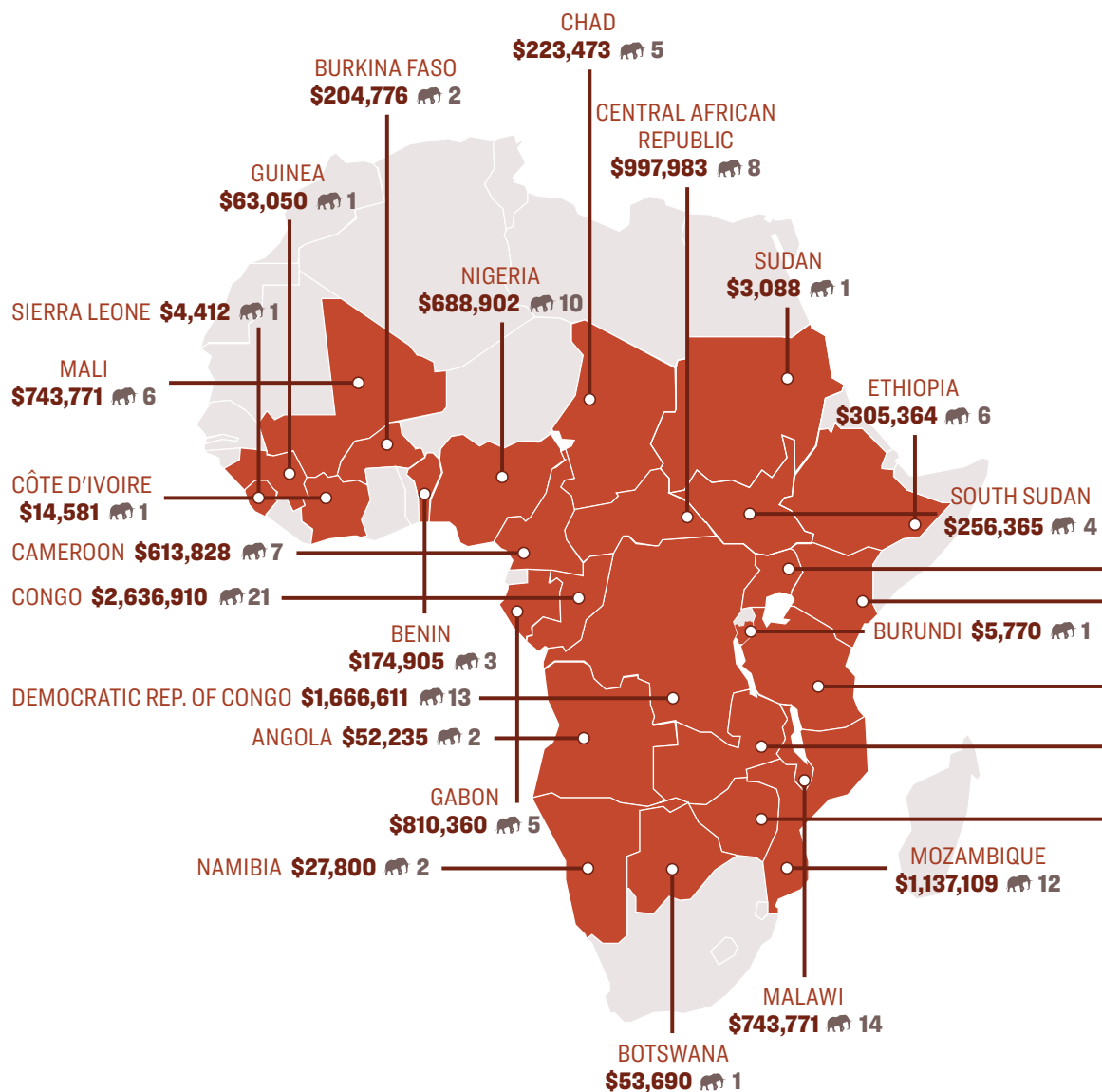


WWF China have conducted awareness campaigns in Bangkok during significant festival periods, aimed at Chinese tourists visiting Thailand.  
© WWF Thailand

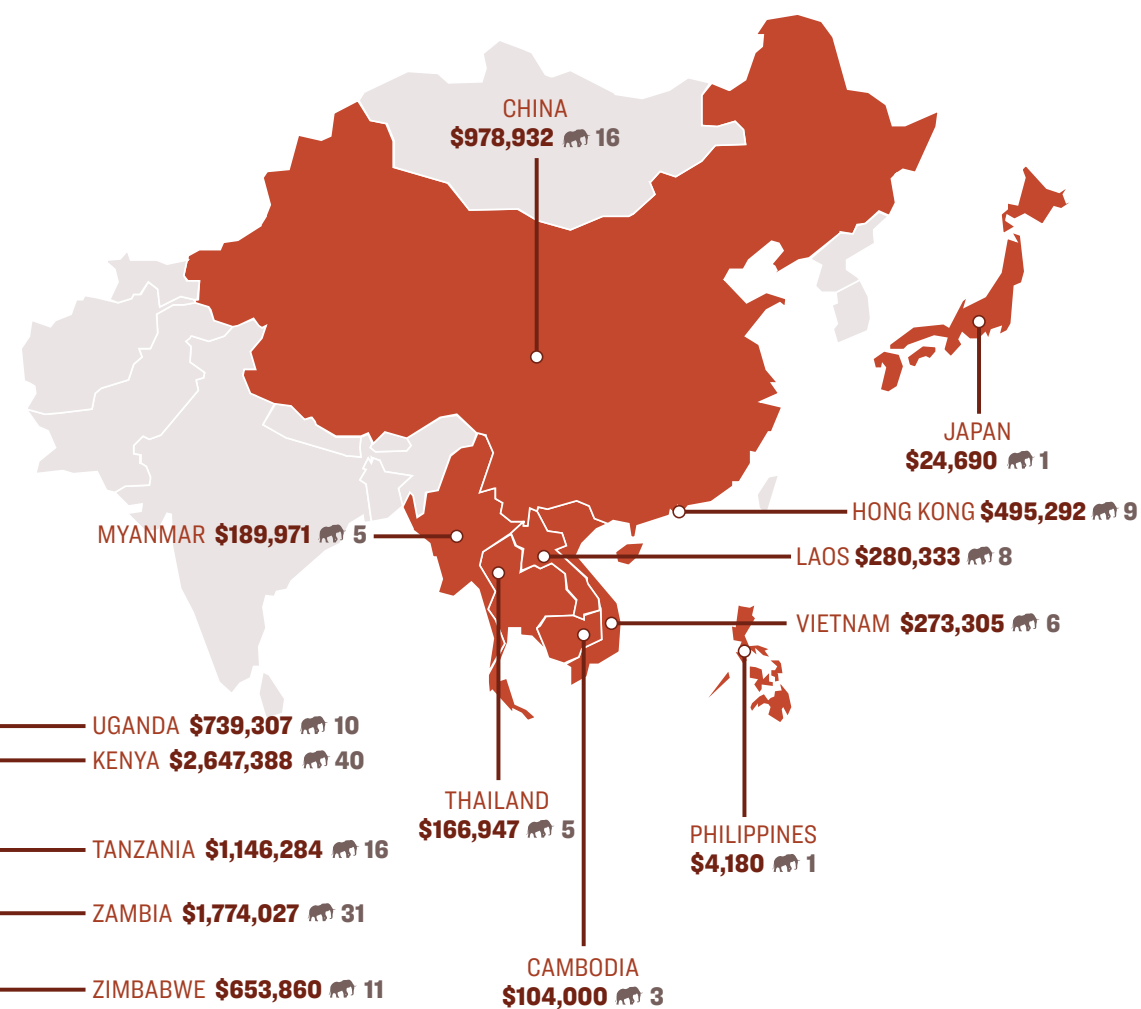


# GLOBAL INVESTMENTS TO END THE IVORY CRISIS


## ECF GRANTS BY COUNTRY AND US\$ INVESTMENT



★ The ECF has also funded 18 anti-trafficking grants that span multiple countries, totalling \$2,077,291. In addition, the ECF has funded four grants in the USA totalling \$91,649.



## KEY

**\$** Amount granted (US\$)  
 Number of grants

This map includes all grants issued since the launch of the ECF in 2013.



# LOOKING AHEAD

PLANS FOR 2020



- Continue support for elephant strongholds, particularly in the Central African rainforests threatened by poachers.
- Monitor the situation in areas affected by the freeze on USFWS funding. If necessary, work to secure additional funds to ensure continuation of anti-poaching in key Central African protected areas.
- Continue support to anti-trafficking efforts, focused on West African ports and on Asian transit hubs.
- Gain deeper understanding of the main shipment methods from Southeast Asia to China, and focus anti-trafficking and demand reduction efforts accordingly.
- Further investigations into the nature of remaining demand for ivory in China in order to drive ECF's demand reduction strategy.
- Extend funding to areas where elephant populations are under threat for more complex reasons than demand for ivory alone.





# Our Partners

After over six years of operations, we are still constantly awed by the dedication and achievements of the amazing partners that we have the honor to support. With their perseverance, often in the face of adversity, the future has improved for many elephant populations in Africa, and there is hope for the future of the species across the continent.

ADM Capital Foundation  
African Parks  
African Wildlife Foundation  
Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux, Gabon  
Basel Institute on Governance  
Big Life Foundation  
Biocarbon Partners  
Born Free Foundation  
Centre on Illicit Networks & Transnational Organised Crime  
Chengeta Wildlife  
Conservation Justice  
Conservation Lake Tanganyika  
Conservation Lower Zambezi  
Conservation South Luangwa  
East African Wildlife Society  
Elephant Family  
Elephant Voices  
Elephants Alive  
Environmental Investigation Agency  
Fauna and Flora International  
Focus Africa  
Focused Conservation Solutions  
Forgotten Parks Foundation  
Frankfurt Zoological Society  
Freeland  
Game Rangers International  
Global Wildlife Conservation  
Gorongosa Restoration Project  
Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation  
International Fund for Animal Welfare  
Kenya Wildlife Service  
Kissama Foundation  
Legal Assistance Centre, Namibia  
Liberty Shared  
Lilongwe Wildlife Trust  
Lukuru Wildlife Research Foundation

Maisha Consulting  
Mara Elephant Project  
Maravi Risk Management  
Mareja Community Conservation Project  
Natural Resource Conservation Network  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Northern Rangelands Trust  
Oxford Brookes University  
PAMS Foundation  
Save The Elephants  
Southern Tanzania Elephant Project  
Space for Giants  
Stichting Wings for Conservation  
Stop Ivory  
Tashinga Initiative Trust  
The WILD Foundation  
The Zambezi Society  
Tikki Hywood Foundation  
TRAFFIC  
Tsavo Trust  
Uganda Conservation Foundation  
University of Utah IsoForensics  
University of Washington  
Wild Planet Trust  
WildAid  
Wildlife Action Group Malawi  
Wildlife Conservation Global  
Wildlife Conservation Society  
Wildlife Crime Prevention  
Wildlife Justice Commission  
Wildlife Traxx Consultancy  
Wildlife Works  
WildlifeDirect  
Working Dogs for Conservation  
World Wildlife Fund  
Zoological Society of London



A close-up, high-resolution photograph of an elephant's head, focusing on the eye and the surrounding wrinkled skin. The skin is a mix of brown and tan tones, with deep, textured wrinkles. The eye is a small, dark, almond-shaped opening, partially obscured by a tuft of dark, coarse hair. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin.

# Thank you

We all share a commitment to elephants, and try to ensure that they have a future in the increasingly challenging world in which we live. We would like to thank you for your support to the ECF, without which none of the work outlined in this report would be possible. Wildlife Conservation Network and Save the Elephants take on your trust with the utmost responsibility, to make sure that your support is applied where it matters most, and that your enthusiasm is channeled into a future for elephants across Africa.

We are extremely grateful to the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation as the founding partner of the ECF, to our incredible private contributors, and to the dedicated backing from our major supporters, #knotonmyplanet and Tiffany & Co.





SAVE THE ELEPHANTS



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

[elephantcrisisfund.org](http://elephantcrisisfund.org)