

Ivory Seizures in Europe 2006–2015

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Introduction

We have reached a critical point in time for elephants. The number of wild elephants across the world has fallen dramatically in recent years. Africa's elephant population dropped by 30% between 2007 and 2014 according to the last Great Elephant Census, which indicated that 144,000 elephants died across 15 African countries during that time period.

The biggest threat to elephants today is poaching. Indeed, the African elephant population declined by more than 50% between 1979 and 1989, mainly due to poaching to supply the international ivory trade.¹ Practically all ivory for sale in the world has come at the cost of an elephant's life.

There have been some strong political moves in recent years with China and the US introducing domestic ivory bans, as people recognise that the existence of legal markets around the world provides a cover for illegal ivory to be traded. Each year more than 20,000 elephants are being slaughtered because of consumer demand and ivory traders creating a desire to own ivory products.

It is virtually impossible to fully calculate the scale of this illegal ivory market. This report seeks to investigate the quantities of seized, illegal ivory that have been reported across the European Union (EU) and to use this data to gain a better understanding of the role the EU plays in enabling the continuation of this trade as a consumer, exporter and transit point for the illegal ivory trade.

Each year more than 20,000 elephants are being slaughtered because of consumer demand and ivory traders creating a desire to own ivory products.

The international ivory trade has been banned by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1989. Yet, the CITES agreement did not cover the sale of ivory obtained before that date. Moreover, CITES data indicates that illicit trade in ivory has tripled since 1998, leading to a 'serious conservation crisis'.² As a new party to CITES since July 2015,³ the EU has a decisive role to play in controlling its internal ivory market as well as its international imports and exports.

This IFAW research indicates that the EU plays a significant role in the global ivory trade. Between 2011 and 2014, member states detailed seizures of around 4,500 ivory items reported as specimens and an additional 780 kilograms as classified by weight.⁴ EU countries are key transit points for illegal ivory, either exported to other countries or kept within Europe, under the guise of ivory items acquired legally or as reported antiques, with some items being stained to appear as antiques.⁵ By exporting ivory items which are antique and legal to South-East Asian markets, European countries are fuelling the demand for ivory and helping to create a desire to own it. Between 2003 and 2014, 92% of EU exports of pre-Convention tusks went to China or Hong Kong.⁶

Six of the EU member states (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands and Portugal) stated definitively that they have observed an increase in the number of re-export certificate applications over the past few years.⁷ Yet several other countries either made no applications for the re-export

of ivory in recent years or the numbers of applications received/certificates issued were so small that it was impossible to discern any significant trends (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Sweden and Slovakia).⁸

This report looks at each European country in turn, where data is available, highlighting key cases of ivory seizures as well as the largest volume of ivory seized by the authorities. Finally, the report puts forward a number of key recommendations for the EU. There is an urgent need for a **common method of recording ivory seizures, and an EU-wide standardised monitoring system of the ivory trade**. As countries already have to report to CITES authorities through the CITES Biennial Reports, not all seizures are made publicly available, which has hindered our data collection for this report. There needs to be a greater level of transparency and the EU needs to make ivory seizure data publicly available in a report every year, recorded in a consistent manner to compare country data across the EU. We hope this research will encourage a full European-wide ban and that individual countries, such as France and the UK, will lead within Europe to introduce the strongest legislation, which will send a powerful political message across the world. It is only by closing down the ivory markets once and for all, and removing consumer demand and desire for ivory products, that we will have any chance to save the remaining elephant populations and ultimately protect this iconic species from extinction.

¹ http://www.ssn.org/Meetings/cop/cop13/Other/CoP13_Ivory_Report.pdf

² <http://www.cic-wildlife.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/AfricanIndabaVol13-1.pdf>

³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/gaborone_en.htm

⁴ <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/without-crackdown-ivory-trade-elephants-could-be-extinct-within-25-years-eu-warned>

⁵ <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2017-0034/CDP-2017-0034.pdf> (Page 18).

⁶ <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/without-crackdown-ivory-trade-elephants-could-be-extinct-within-25-years-eu-warned>

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Ivory%20report_Nov%202014.pdf (Page 15).

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Ivory%20report_Nov%202014.pdf (Page 16).

Methodology

The report focused on data that is public, easily accessible and predominantly available online. Sources include auction house websites, police force reports and other investigation reports conducted by NGOs. Notably, TRAFFIC’s report ‘Rapid Survey of UK Ivory Market’ was helpful to get a sense of the UK ivory market, with a focus on the antiques sector. The Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) database was also used extensively for this report.

Data directly published by countries themselves (in particular, through excerpts of UK Parliamentary debates and news outlets in various countries) has also been included as well as data published by the EU and the US Department of Justice, which provided a more accurate assessment of the exports of ivory from all EU countries. The authors acknowledge this research is not exhaustive

and conclusions drawn from the information collected are afforded appropriate caveats throughout the report.

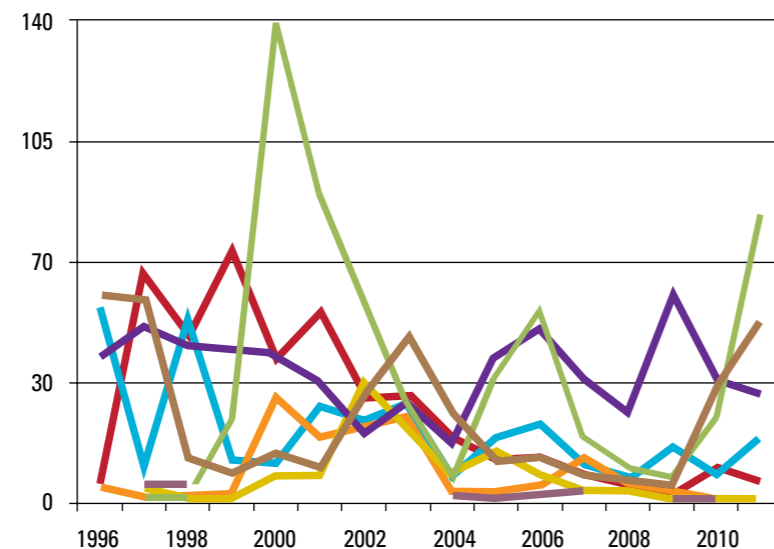
Since 2016 data is not fully available yet, the time period of this study typically spans 2006 until 2015. The biggest barrier during this research was the lack of standardised, public reporting of ivory seizure data. Every EU country has its own methods of reporting, with varying degrees of visibility, which prevented a comparison of like-with-like seizures. The terminology and reporting methods varied across all of the countries looked at: some items were weighed, others were collected together and counted as one seizure, while others were reported as individual items.

In addition to those countries examined in this report the following countries were also investigated – but due to lack of available information were not included in the final report: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Russia.

Whilst values of ivory are referenced throughout this report, IFAW believes that ivory only has value when on a living elephant.

Table shows the number of reported seizures per country per year as reported to ETIS⁹

- Austria
- Belgium
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Netherlands
- UK
- Switzerland



⁹ Data taken from: <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0076539#pone.0076539.s004>

COUNTRY DATA

Austria

The main source of information with regards to ivory seizures in Austria was the ETIS database. The country had relatively few seizures over the period 1997–2010; its largest ones occurred on 16th November 2016, when police recovered 90 tusks wrapped in blankets in two Vienna apartments.



Investigators had been alerted in early November, as the sale of three tusks had been witnessed on a street in the city. Police then searched the seller’s apartments, where the 564 kilograms of raw ivory were hidden. The Ministry of Finance evaluated the seizures as worth €560,000 (nearly \$600,000 USD) and police specified that the tusks, originally from African and Indian elephants, were likely destined for countries such as China and Vietnam. According to police, the ivory was smuggled to Europe by sea, and then to Austria by road.¹⁰

The maximum sentence faced by the ivory trafficker, who was a former boxer, was two years in prison. This is clearly not a significant punishment considering the economic and environmental impact of his crime. The

discrepancy between the impressive nature of this seizure, the largest ever in Austria, and the small sentence to which it led needs to be addressed.

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¹⁰ <http://www.ifaw.org/united-states/news/paltry-vienna-ivory-bust-sentence-reinforces-need-european-action-plan>

Belgium

Belgium appears to be a key player in the ivory trade, both legal and illegal. In 2007 a report by TRAFFIC revealed ivory was the most frequently seized CITES-listed wildlife product in Belgium.¹¹ During our research we found records of more than 200 seizures reported between 1996 and 2016, with nearly 240 kilograms of raw ivory and 3,400 worked ivory items recovered by customs authorities.



Belgian authorities reported to CITES that ivory is the 'most frequently seized item' by police forces.¹²

The historical context of the ivory trade in Belgium is noteworthy: between 1989 and 1992, the country was a global hub for the ivory trade between the African producer countries and the Asian consumer countries, with several hundred ivory objects on sale in large Belgian cities such as Brussels, Antwerp and Ghent.¹³ Belgium, and in particular Brussels International Airport, seems to have kept its status as a key transit point for ivory today. Most illegal ivory that is seized in the country is done so by the GAD brigade (*Anti-drug Belgian Customs Group*).

Indeed, it appears most seizures occur at airports, notably the Brussels International Airport during routine controls.

The 2011 – 2012 CITES Biennial Report highlights that more than 95% of seizures involving CITES specimens (not only elephant ivory) were made by the GAD of the Customs Service of the airport.¹⁴

Belgium CITES Biennial Reports

It is worth noting the greater degree of precision in the recordings of publicly available seizures in Belgium for the year 2013. Most data for that year was found in the CITES Biennial 2013 – 2014 Report; however, previous Biennial Reports did not publish as much information on ivory seizures. In view of the 26 different seizures reported in detail during 2013, it appears evident that smaller seizures in other years may have occurred – but haven't been accurately reported. There is a clear need for a common system of reporting and monitoring the trade in ivory.

Case study 1

In 2011, 56 of the total number of seizures recorded by the GAD involved ivory and elephant tusks: overall, more than 120 kilograms were seized. Most seizures (53) involved ivory carvings, which amounted to 1,469 pieces of ivory (jewels, statues, other objects). Between January and February 2011, a 'large amount of ivory' was seized during Operation GAPIN, an enforcement initiative coordinated by the World Customs Organization (WCO) and funded by the Swedish government to fight the illicit trafficking in wildlife.¹⁵

In the framework of GAPIN, two additional officers joined the GAD team at Brussels International Airport, which scanned all high-risk shipments and luggage from Africa on a daily basis with X-ray machines. Such strengthened controls enabled the GAD force to seize large amounts of ivory, dried seahorses and bush meat in 11 different seizures.

Problems with seizure recordings

CITES Parties are mandated to share information on elephant ivory and other elephant product seizures with the Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna In Commerce (TRAFFIC) via the CITES Secretariat within 90 days of their occurrence. Yet, in their Biennial Reports to CITES, the reporting authorities for Belgium acknowledge that the seizures presented are not complete because their services 'do not systematically receive copies of all the records relating to CITES specimen seizures made by the Belgian enforcement authorities'. There would appear to be some miscommunication between police, border control authorities and the team reporting to the CITES Secretariat. This is concerning as items are not being fully accounted for, and the data sharing and recording methods amongst agencies are not reporting the full extent of the illegal ivory market in Belgium.

In the 2005 – 2006 CITES Biennial Report, Belgian authorities did not differentiate between elephant and hippopotamus ivory: the 15 seizures recorded for each year are thus only estimates. In addition, Belgium acknowledges in its 2011 – 2012 CITES Biennial Report that not all ivory seizures are weighed.¹⁶ This prevents a clear comparative table being drawn to identify trends in ivory trafficking.

¹¹ <http://www.traffic.org/home/2007/5/30/top-of-the-cops-ivory-number-1-in-belgian-cites-seizures.html>

¹² Studies completed between 1984 and 2008. <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/07-08Belgium.pdf> (Page 65).

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/11-12Belgium.pdf> (Page 51).

¹⁵ http://www.wcoamd.org/~media/wco/public/global/pdf/media/annual-reports/annual_report_2011_12_en.pdf (Page 34).

¹⁶ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/11-12Belgium.pdf> (Page 54).

By destroying its ivory stockpile, Belgium sent a powerful message to the rest of the world.

Destruction of Belgium's ivory stockpile

On 9th April 2014, Belgium destroyed approximately 1.5 tonnes¹⁷ of illegal ivory; a portion of the ivory seized and stockpiled over the previous 25 years.¹⁸ Representatives of the European Commission, the CITES Secretariat, IFAW and the Belgian Government, scientists and customs officers were present at the 'Palais des Colonies' in Tervuren, where the destruction took place. This stockpile represented the multiple confiscations of ivory that various controlling authorities had carried out since 1984, the year in which the CITES Convention entered into force in Belgium.

By destroying its ivory stockpile, Belgium sent a powerful message to the rest of the world. Seeing the substantial figures of raw and worked ivory still being smuggled into the country, the Belgian government should come to the realisation that even an allegedly narrow market for antique and pre-Convention ivory leaves the door open for the illegal market in ivory products to thrive.

Case study 2

International co-operation

International co-operation among countries is necessary in order to put an end to the illegal wildlife trade. Belgium was largely engaged with its international partners, for instance with Israel. Notably, the GAD cooperated with Israeli enforcement authorities in 2011 – 2012, which led to the seizure of more than 20 kilograms of ivory. Police forces intercepted luggage at Brussels Airport, destined for Israel, containing several antique items including two painted elephant tusks, an ivory statue and a sword with a handgrip in ivory. This seizure led to a house search in Israel, where some ivory items were found.



¹⁷ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/13-14Belgium.pdf> (Page 54) Picture from National Geographic.

¹⁸ <http://www.ifaw.org/european-union/news/belgium%E2%80%99s-99s-ivory-crush-will-create-ripples-throughout-europe>

Czech Republic

All seizures occurred at airports, which again highlights Europe's role as a major transportation hub for illegal ivory

The only recorded seizures from within the Czech Republic that this research could locate all took place in 2014, with data compiled by TRAFFIC showing seizures of 33.05 kg, 63.7 kg, 31.68 kg, 35.5 kg and 23.76 kg.¹⁹ Case studies of ivory seizures in the Czech Republic illustrate the role of the country, and the EU as a whole, as a key transit point within the global ivory market.



The seizures reported involved Vietnamese nationals living in the Czech Republic en route to Asia. All seizures occurred at airports, which again highlights Europe's role as a major transportation hub for illegal ivory.

In the January 2014 seizure, the tusks were found during a regular X-ray check of luggage: a common technique for transporting raw ivory is to cut the tusks into pieces and hide them in several suitcases. In all cases, the raw ivory was destined for Vietnam, where the approximate price of one kilogram of ivory reaches \$1,100 USD on the black market.²⁰ The total weight of the seized ivory was 220.69 kilograms and was estimated to be worth nearly \$250,000 USD.

During this research it emerged that there was a clear lack of data for the Czech Republic. It is hard to hypothesise on the meaning of the lack of data compared to other EU countries. It could simply be that the illegal ivory trade is less abundant in this country, or it may, worryingly, be an indicator that Czech authorities are not thoroughly investigating or reporting seizures publicly. It could also indicate a lack of enforcement priority or knowledge, which again highlights the inconsistent approach by some enforcement agencies across Europe.

¹⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Overview%20significant%20seizures%202014.pdf> (Page 7).

²⁰ According to the CEO of Save the Elephants. http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-07/20/c_135525376.htm

Denmark

Although not one of the most frequently mentioned countries in our research, Denmark has still played a steady role in the seizing of illegal ivory in Europe over the years.



The Born Free Foundation revealed details of three individual ivory seizures that took place in Denmark in 2003.²¹ All three occurred at key transport hubs, namely Copenhagen and Billung Airports. These examples once again highlight how crucial good quality enforcement is at international transport hubs if Europe is to stamp out the illegal ivory trade altogether.

A total of 25 seizures were reported over an eight-year period between 1996 and 2003 according to ETIS data, not an immaterial quantity.

²¹ Born Free Foundation, as part of the Species Survival Network Elephant Working Group (SSN EWG), 2004 Report. (Page 35). http://www.ssn.org/Meetings/cop/cop13/Other/CoP13_Ivory_Report.pdf



France

France is another hub in the European and global ivory trade. As the figures opposite highlight, the country is a major transit route in the illegal ivory trade as well as a destination country. In 2006 there were a number of significant ivory seizures with 921 kilograms of raw ivory and 600 kilograms of (worked) chippings found at a French factory on 22nd November 2006.²² One month later, the French customs authorities reported finding an additional 600 kilograms of raw ivory.



Investigations on illegal wildlife trade can take a long time to reach completion. In September 2015, French customs in the city of Poitiers inspected a vehicle and found four African elephant tusks, totalling 43 kilograms of raw ivory, without any paperwork. The driver and two passengers were part of an organisation involved in endangered wildlife trafficking. One of the leaders of the network was the CEO of a business firm dedicated to antique markets in the Paris region, which highlighted the link between European markets and the illegal ivory trade. On 25th May 2016, police raided the operation's headquarters, where 16 African elephant tusks were discovered, amounting to 212 kilograms of raw ivory. Hidden among the rest of the (presumably) legal stock waiting to be sold, these tusks did not have any CITES documentation specifying their origin or permit of possession.

This example clearly highlights the difficulty in separating out illegal ivory from the legal antique ivory trade, and also how the legal trade can be used as cover for illegal activity. The firm in question focused on the legal sale of antiques, so it was easier for its CEO to engage in ivory trafficking by smuggling illegal ivory tusks amongst legal antique stores and shipments. It is clear in this case that the antique ivory description created a loophole that traffickers exploited to smuggle illegal ivory.

Seizures of ivory by French customs between 2002 and 2015²³

Year	Number of seizures per year	Quantities seized (in kg)	Main countries of origin of the ivory
2002	72	128	Cameroon, Gabon, Zimbabwe
2003	34	154	Ivory Coast, Gabon, Zimbabwe
2004	38	309	Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Zimbabwe
2005	33	284	Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon
2006	62	1,875	South Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania
2007	52	149	Cameroon, Guinea, Central African Republic
2008	54	306	Cameroon, Mozambique, Zambia
2009	36	78	Cameroon, Mali, Tanzania
2010	87	556	Cameroon, Gabon, Mozambique
2011	81	549	Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Guinea
2012	57	346	Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Guinea
2013	126	376.4kg and 435 pieces	Cameroon, Mali, Guinea, Portugal
2014	82	230kg and 470 pieces	Cameroon, Mali, Guinea
2015	97	448kg and 365 pieces	Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, Ivory Coast

Changes in the law

On 6th February 2014, French enforcement agencies destroyed more than three tonnes of ivory – around 15,000 items – which were destroyed in public in Paris. This ivory was seized between 1987 and 2007 by French Customs at Roissy, controlling both air freight and passengers' luggage. This landmark event underscored the commitment of France to ban the domestic ivory trade, a measure put forth by former Environment Minister Ségolène Royal. Eventually, the political momentum that the burning of ivory generated resulted in a complete ban on raw ivory and limited ban on worked ivory announced in 2016.²⁴



²² https://eia-international.org/wp-content/uploads/EIA_Large-scale-ivory-seizures_V3-January-2000-to-December-2016.pdf (Page 1).

²³ <http://www.douane.gouv.fr/Portals/0/fichiers/actualites/2016-06/2016-06-08-dossier-de-presse-saisie-de-plus-de-350-kg-d-ivoire-en-ile-de-france.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.ifaw.org/united-states/news/near-total-ivory-ban-finalized-france>

Germany

According to a rough analysis by the German government, since the beginning of 1996 German customs authorities have seized and confiscated approximately 200 tusks and 53 other parts of raw ivory. Additionally, 6,700 ivory carvings have been seized.²⁵ This is a significant volume of ivory being either traded or transited through Germany, indicating that the country is being used as a route by ivory smugglers.



Most ivory seizures occur at the German border controls, be it at airports or during the control of shipments at ports. As Germany's 2005 – 2006 Biennial Report to CITES reports, two shipments were inspected at ports and several ivory carvings discovered, which allegedly were made of mammoth ivory. An expert investigation revealed that 12 of the carvings, which had arrived from Togo, were made of elephant ivory.

In its Biennial Report to CITES, Germany also reported that 23 seizures of ivory carvings and tusks occurred between March and July 2007.

The amount of ivory seized by German authorities dramatically increased in 2016. In May 2016, German customs at Berlin Schönefeld airport found 625 kilograms of ivory in boxes destined for Vietnam, and the false paperwork. This extensive seizure led to the arrest of two

suspects in a warehouse near Koblenz at the end of August 2016. There, police discovered a further 570 kilograms of ivory, as well as grinding and cutting machines probably used to carve the material not only for domestic markets in Europe, but also for re-export.²⁶

This case highlighted the activities of criminal networks working within Europe in the global illegal trade of ivory and the role of Germany as a major transit route between Africa and Asia. It also highlighted that illegal manufacturing of ivory was taking place in the country as well as some re-exporting of finished manufactured goods made from ivory to Vietnam. The Washington Convention allows the re-export of antique and pre-Convention ivory, which means that European countries can provide a potentially safe ground for traffickers to process raw ivory into finished carvings that can be artificially aged and more easily transported

across borders as antiques. There are also opportunities to apply for legal paperwork, as the industry is self-certifying in relation to antiques. This case highlights the excellent intelligence and work of the enforcement agencies in breaking an illegal smuggling and manufacturing ring.

Combined, these two seizures resulted in the largest amount of ivory ever seized in Germany, and also the largest within Europe over the last 10 years. According to German customs president Uwe Schroeder, the 1.2 tonnes consisted of complete tusks, carvings and cut-up pieces. German authorities estimated that this seizure was worth €1 million.

The table above provides an overview of ivory seizures in Germany, between 2006 and 2016.²⁷ Data was provided by the German government enforcement authorities (mainly customs agencies) in response to a parliamentary request.

However, there are significant discrepancies between the data provided by the German government and the data collected through our simple online research. This can possibly be explained by the fact that there are no standard monitoring practices of ivory seizures, and that some seizures found online or in the CITES Biennial Reports solely indicate the number of 'specimens' of ivory, not specifying whether raw or worked ivory products, or both, were found.²⁸ It was noticeable that some seizure data was not available online.

²⁵ <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btd/18/107/1810738.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.ifaw.org/africa/news/germanys-recent-seizures-illegal-ivory-trade>

²⁷ <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btd/18/107/1810738.pdf>

²⁸ Sept. 2016, Deutscher Bundestag – Drucksache 18/9624) <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btd/18/096/1809624.pdf>

²⁹ CITES Biennial Document 2005-2006 (page 87). <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/05-06Germany.pdf>

Overview of ivory seizures in Germany, between 2006 and 2016

Year	Cases	Tusks (Total number of seized tusks are shown in brackets)	Ivory pieces	Carvings
2006	43	5	1	467
2007	59	23 (26) 5.96kg	1	129 – 2.30kg
2008	28	7 (12) 8.62kg	–	135 – 0.42kg
2009	45	10	9	563
2010	38	6	2	360
2011	41	1	9 – 1.99kg	1,920
2012	64	7 (9) 8.10kg	5	545 – 1.64kg
2013	60	11.02kg	6 – 0.98kg	61 – 47.77kg
2014	42	–	98.68kg	39 – 37.81kg
2015	36	14.62kg	0.41kg	264 – 14.36kg
2016	17	40	–	ca. 725kg–11

A report produced by BfN (The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation) at the beginning of 2015 for CITES states that approximately 919 kg of ivory tusks were seized and confiscated by German enforcement authorities. Additionally, between 1996 and 2014 about 7.500 ivory carvings were confiscated by custom authorities.²⁸

Italy

Based on our research, Italy does not appear to report a major quantity of ivory seizures, either due to lack of illegal activity compared to other European countries or possibly due to lower reporting or lower enforcement.



In its Biennial Report to CITES, Italy does not publish any figures for its ivory seizures except for the year 2013: out of 476 controls by the police, nine seizures of ivory occurred. The report, however, does not specify how much ivory was seized, the nature of the specimens, nor the sentences imposed on the offenders. In contrast a map produced by the EIA shows several seizures not noted in Biennial reports, such as 400kg confiscated in April 2015 in La Spezia and ivory objects seized in Sicily in February 2016.³¹ Perhaps the amounts of these seizures were

too small to generate coverage in the mainstream media, which would highlight that the need to implement an EU-wide standard reporting method for seizures of wildlife products – in particular for ivory – is even more urgent.

It is also worth noting that Italy plays a large role in the legal ivory trade as well. In 2015 it was reported to be the largest exporter of legal ivory to Hong Kong.³² Clearly Italy's place within the international ivory trade market should not be underestimated.

The most notable seizure reported was in April 2003, when 130 pieces of worked ivory were recovered by the police at Rome International Airport.³⁰

³⁰ http://www.ssn.org/Meetings/cop/cop13/Other/CoP13_Ivory_Report.pdf (Page 38).

³¹ <https://eia-international.org/illegal-trade-seizures-elephant-ivory-europe>

³² <http://www.robinderbois.org/en/english-les-exportations-divoire-depuis-lunion-europeenne/>

Netherlands

One of the biggest seizures occurred in 2009, when customs authorities seized 85.4 kilos of raw ivory.³⁴

The Netherlands has played a key role in efforts to eliminate the illegal trade in ivory, with 27 separate ivory seizures listed in the ETIS database during the time period reviewed in this research (2006 – 2015).³³

The main sources of data for ivory seizures in the Netherlands were the ETIS figures and the CITES Biennial Reports provided by the Dutch government to the CITES administration. There are sometimes discrepancies between the two sets of data, which are hard to explain: for instance, data from ETIS and the Biennial Reports both outline five seizures of ivory for the year 2008, but the Biennial Report highlights 14 seizures in 2006, against five items found in the ETIS database. Similarly, the figures differ for the years 2005 and 2007.

This again highlights that information is recorded differently across Europe and how difficult it is to develop a comprehensive picture.

There are several especially large seizures listed in the Netherlands CITES Biennial Reports during this time period. One of the biggest seizures occurred in 2009, when customs authorities seized 85.4 kilos of raw ivory.³⁴ Another significant year was 2012 when records show 50 tusks and 130 carvings were seized. Notably many of the seizures listed by the Netherlands took place at airports. In 2014 all four of the major ivory confiscations listed took place in an airport with Egypt and China listed as destination countries.³⁵



³³ <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0076539#pone.0076539.s005>

³⁴ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/09-10Netherlands.pdf> (Page 35).

³⁵ <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/reports/13-14Netherlands.pdf> (Pages 105 – 109).



United Kingdom

The UK is one of the world's busiest transport hubs, with its airports handling huge numbers of international flights. Many goods in transit pass through these airports, which unfortunately makes them ideal for smugglers seeking to move ivory globally. The UK has one of the most professional and experienced CITES Customs Units in the world.

re-used, or items could be being recorded under fake certificates from other countries. Either way, this raises an important question about the accuracy of the data being recorded in destination countries. It is clear that by allowing a legal trade of antique ivory to South-East Asia, the UK risks providing a cover for the illegal ivory trade.

In recent years the number of seizures in the UK has increased, which could be attributable to better enforcement but could also indicate a higher level of criminal activity. Between 2010 and 2014 the UK reported 154 seizures to ETIS (345.5 kg in raw ivory equivalent [RIE]). This is a considerable increase on the previous five-year period during which 75 seizure records, totalling 134 kg RIE, were reported.³⁷

CITES trade data indicates that the UK is a net exporter of ivory for commercial purposes and is one of the largest ivory markets in Europe. 990 kg and 54,000 specimens of ivory were re-exported for commercial purposes between 2005 and 2014 (only 2% of which was raw ivory), mainly destined for markets in South-East Asia. Thus, the UK is playing a significant role in supplying those with a desire to own ivory. Worryingly, a recent TRAFFIC report found that more raw ivory items were imported than were re-exported, which raises a number of concerns. Legitimate paperwork could be being used as a cover for the illegal ivory trade, with Article 10 certificates being

In a parliamentary debate, Members of Parliament observed that between 2009 and 2014, nearly 40% of all UK customs wildlife trade seizures were ivory items.³⁶

³⁶ <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-12-08/debates/F3FD9D0-FA62-4135-9D94-ECEBA5C246E1/BackbenchBusiness>

³⁷ http://www.trafficj.org/publication/16_A_Rapid_Survey_of_UK_Ivory_Markets.pdf

Operation Thunderbird

Between 30th January and 19th February 2017, UK Border Force took part in a global INTERPOL led operation targeting the illegal wildlife and timber trade. The UK had 182 seizures, which included 11 kilos of ivory. The enforcement operations were conducted at several different locations including docks, scrapyards, pawn shops, pet shops, antique stores and traditional healers. Globally, Operation Thunderbird seized 2.54 tonnes of raw and processed ivory.³⁸

Operation Thunderbird shows how a highly co-ordinated effort to tackle the illegal wildlife trade can be incredibly effective. The concentrated efforts of UK Border Force for the duration of the operation serve only to highlight the breadth of the illegal wildlife trade and the problem posed by illegal ivory within the UK.

2012 was a record year for the number of ivory items seized in the UK, with 45 item seizures taking place totalling 84 kg of RIE. In 2015, the UK's largest single seizure took place, weighing an incredible 110 kg and consisting of items such as tusks, carved bangles and beads. They were discovered at Heathrow Airport, en route from Angola to Germany. In terms of volume of ivory, this seizure was the largest in 10 years.³⁹

Despite this high, and apparently rising, level of activity, the UK still has no standardised way of reporting wildlife crime. Changing this would help improve enforcement as it would simplify enforcers' work whilst also improving efficiency and accountability.

The antique ivory loophole

TRAFFIC's 'Rapid' survey of the UK ivory market⁴⁰ revealed the need for stricter regulations surrounding the sales of antique ivory. Its seizure data showed that the UK plays a role in the illegal ivory trade, particularly as a transit country.

UK legislation allows worked specimens to be exported outside the EU for commercial purposes, either as pre-1947 antiques or post-1947 modern ivory with appropriate certification. There is a ban in the UK on the sale and re-export of raw, unworked ivory, whatever the age.

The current legislation is difficult to enforce as it is hard to prove the age of an item, and expensive radiocarbon dating tests will only approximate an item's age to within 10 years. The 1947 deadline marking the age of an antique for ivory is complex to enforce and would require police officers to have specialised expertise in ageing techniques. Without radiocarbon dating tests it is hard to tell apart modern from antique ivory, especially as items can simply be stained to artificially age their appearance – as has been shown by seizures made by the



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Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit. Many items passed off as antique do not have proof of age, documentation or provenance, especially when an item is sold online. At street markets, traders are also much of the time only vaguely aware of the origin of the ivory they are selling. The 2016 TRAFFIC Rapid survey of ivory markets in the UK revealed that many of the buyers also want to take the products outside Europe, and some were encouraged to do so by market traders without any CITES documentation, which is illegal under UK legislation.⁴¹

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³⁸ <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/02/border-forces-role-in-operation-thunderbird/>

³⁹ http://www.trafficj.org/publication/16_A_Rapid_Survey_of_UK_Ivory_Markets.pdf

⁴⁰ http://www.trafficj.org/publication/16_A_Rapid_Survey_of_UK_Ivory_Markets.pdf

⁴¹ http://www.trafficj.org/publication/16_A_Rapid_Survey_of_UK_Ivory_Markets.pdf (Page 10).

Summary of ivory seizure data for UK

Detailed breakdown of UK seizures in Appendix 1

Year	Seizures	Items	Weight kg	Fraudulently evading restrictions
2007	11			
2008	20	24	2.2	
2009	34	431	2.2	
2010	23	44	3.3	
2011	19			
2012	50	Several hundred carved items	95.7	
2013	18	246	16.5	3
2014	12	1,141	35.25	
2015	345		314	
2016		43		

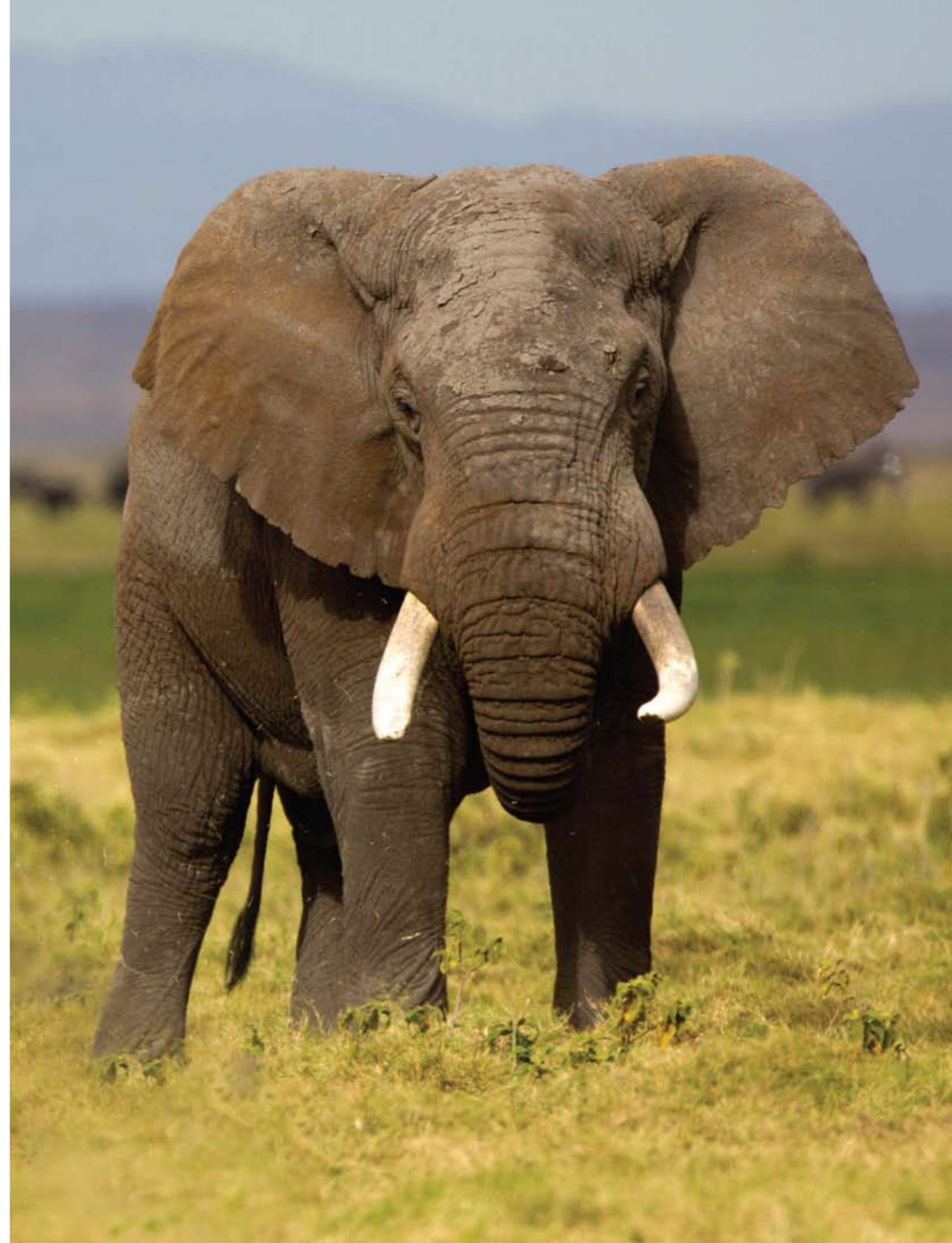
Even legitimate antique ivory plays a significant role in the modern poaching of elephants. A report by Wild Aid showed that a total of 2,524 legal ivory items were sent from Britain to Hong Kong in 2015, up from 1,141 the year before.⁴² IFAW has similarly reported on the import of antique ivory items into China from the UK and the rest of Europe, finding that this trade is encouraging people to buy ivory. This demand can create a perfect environment in which the illegal market can flourish.

As a result, it is far too easy for modern ivory in the UK to be passed off and sold as ‘antique’. Thus, thriving antique ivory markets indirectly reflect growth of the illegal ivory trade. Closing the antique ivory loophole in the UK is therefore vital in order to prevent illegally-obtained ivory from being smuggled into loosely controlled legal markets.

Recent examples of illegal ivory trading in the UK

- Christie’s Auction House was fined more than £3,000 in 2016 for selling a piece of elephant ivory without the relevant documentation.
- In September 2016, the UK’s National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCUC) prosecuted a British citizen for trying to sell illegal ivory carvings on eBay.
- In November 2016 a similar case was brought by the NWCUC against an eBay offender, who sold 78 ivory items (valued at £6,408) over a two-year period, of which 59 items were exported outside the EU.

A report by Wild Aid showed that a total of 2,524 legal ivory items were sent from Britain to Hong Kong in 2015, up from 1,141 the year before.⁴²



⁴² <https://www.antiquetradejournal.com/news/2016/british-ivory-exports-to-hong-kong-under-scrutiny/>

Issues noted by some European enforcement agencies during the research

A report by TRAFFIC published in 2014 highlighted the most common difficulties cited by enforcement agencies when assessing applications for the re-exportation of ivory from the EU. The most frequent concerned the verification of legal acquisition or importation (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands and Slovenia).⁴³

The main issues reported were:

- Lack of experts to determine the age of a particular specimen (Latvia)
- Lack of certified laboratory for dating specimens (Greece)
- Expense of specimen dating (Greece)
- Difficulty of estimating age of specimens (Slovenia)
- Country of origin of inherited ivory not known (Slovenia)
- Lack of documentation to prove legal origin (documents lost), (Denmark, Slovenia)
- Difficulty of verifying the legality of internal EU trade certificates issued by other member states, e.g. the marking of ivory in photographs attached to the certificate does not always match the information on the certificate (Netherlands) and deviations from the length and weight stated on the certificate, make it difficult to confirm the identity of the specimen concerned (e.g. of raw tusks), (Austria)
- Time involved in obtaining appropriate evidence of acquisition/ancillary evidence in support of application (Ireland)

⁴³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Ivory%20report_Nov%202014.pdf (Page 21).

Conclusion

This research shows that the EU is a destination for some illegal ivory, is a major transit route between countries (especially between Africa and South-East Asia) and is also a key exporter of antique ivory to SE Asian markets.

The discovery in Germany of a manufacturing centre after a seizure of 625 kilograms of ivory was alarming. The ivory was in boxes destined for Vietnam, with false paperwork that led to a further 570 kilograms of ivory, as well as grinding and cutting machines for carving being seized at a factory.

Six of the EU member states (Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands and Portugal) stated definitively that they have observed an increase in the number of re-export certificate applications over the past few years.⁴⁴

The research shows that seizures vary from year to year and from country to country. This may be due to enforcement operations: intelligence-led work or may even show that smugglers are targeting different countries. This is inconclusive and would require more research to establish if there are random patterns or deliberate attempts by organised criminal networks to exploit countries with more limited enforcement expertise and enforcement controls within Europe.

It is also clear from the research that significant seizures are still being made and that the EU and a number of member states are important transit routes for the international trade. The false certifications in a number of the examples also highlights organised criminal activity and smuggling from Europe to South-East Asian markets.

The lack of publicly available seizure data did prove a problem during the research and meant that we had a limited number of sources, such as Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) data, biennial country reports to CITES and data directly published by countries themselves through governments or enforcement agencies. We also looked at official announcements by law enforcement agencies and major seizures covered by the media over the last 10 years.

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⁴⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/cites/pdf/Ivory%20report_Nov%202014.pdf (Page 15).

It is hard to truly appreciate the scale of the illegal ivory market based solely on publicly available seizure data. Although countries are required to report seizures promptly to ETIS, this data is only released into the public realm on a piecemeal basis. As this report has also shown, press coverage of unusual or large-scale seizures would indicate there are some discrepancies with the information reported.

The seizures considered in this report represent the tip of the iceberg. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that much more ivory is being transited than has been publicly reported.

In their quantitative study of the illegal ivory trade, Underwood, Burn and Milliken (2013) highlight that the variation in the reporting rates of countries might arise from differences both in resources and in the degree of commitment between countries.⁴⁵ Underwood et al highlight that while some countries have automated systems through which they regularly report to ETIS, others have a lower reporting rate: Ivory seizures are mostly revealed by NGOs, rather than the country's CITES Management Authority (CMA). If the Netherlands seems to report regularly to the Biennial CITES Report, its lower figures from ETIS show that the monitoring of ivory seizures might not be as continuous as it should be. In fact, if the Biennial Reports are published every two years, the ETIS database is constantly updated and requires continual efforts from the participating countries.

Despite that lack of transparency, lack of consistency and reliance on limited public data, this research provides a snapshot of the current situation within Europe. It is clear from the evidence collected that a relevant number of European countries do contribute significantly to the illegal ivory market, directly or indirectly.

When enforcement agencies have co-ordinated operations, the results have been impactful, and this is a real testament to the expertise and knowledge of the agencies involved. It would also be fair to say that not all agencies are equal across Europe and that levels of expertise do vary along with operational priorities. The fluctuating seizure numbers reported by individual countries therefore could be a sign that either criminal gangs are manipulating a changing array of routes to avoid detection, or that enforcement isn't applied equally year on year. This could also simply be a result of poor data sharing by individual countries.

Some European countries showed no or staggeringly small numbers of ivory seizures. Is this because there simply is no ivory market in those countries, or is it a sign that enforcement isn't a priority?

The research also notes there is potential for the legitimate antique ivory trade to contribute to demand in Asia. Supplying antique ivory to these high demand countries could be helping ensure demand for ivory remains high. Furthermore, modern ivory can be artificially aged so as to be processed through this antique market. It would seem therefore that the legal ivory trade possibly plays a role in supporting the modern poaching of African elephants.

A question often asked is: Is Europe contributing to the poaching of elephants in Africa? We regularly hear this from politicians and antiques dealers, along with the claim that selling antique ivory is not to blame for the demise of elephants in today's world. Claims that the EU has a very minor role in all of this are often held up. This report has made inroads into disputing these claims, by illustrating seizures in domestic markets, processing plants and transit routes within Europe. Clearly, by considering the types and number of seizures and illegal ivory activities in Europe, this continent plays a significant role in that overall illegal ivory chain and clearly a total ivory ban now needs to be considered.

⁴⁵ <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0076539&type=printable>

Recommendations

1. A consistent documentation approach towards all ivory seizures needs to be adopted by enforcement agencies across Europe. Data should be recorded in a standard format and publicly reported on by the EU on an annual basis.

2. Due to the primary and secondary roles of EU countries in the trade and export of ivory, IFAW has recommended an EU-wide ban on the sale of ivory, including antique ivory, with a few limited, practical exemptions.



Appendix 1

United Kingdom ivory seizure breakdown

2007

- 11 seizures (one raw, 11 worked)

2008

- Seven seizures (seven worked)
- 13 seizures; 24 items; total weight of 2.2 kg
- 18 tusks + one sword + one scabbard

2009

- 16 seizures (16 worked)
- 18 seizures; 431 items; total weight of 2.27 kg

2010

- 15 seizures; 44 items seized; 3.3 kg
- Eight seizures (one raw, seven worked)
- Ivory-laden pool cues (*An American businessman sold ivory online to an undercover London Police Officer; 197 pounds of elephant ivory was seized at his place*)

2011

- 19 seizures (one raw, 18 worked)
- Sale of elephant ivory and hair products on the Internet
- ‘Substantial horde’

2012

- 50 seizures; 80.7 kg (*Seizures mostly made at airports*)
- 15 kg (*Contained several hundred carved items including bangles, beads, name seals and pendants; was being smuggled from Nigeria via London to importers in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, China*)
- Illegally attempting to export ivory (*Being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of a restriction on the exportation of goods, contrary to section 170(2)(b) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 – 80 hours’ community service, 10-week curfew order, £500 costs*)
- Illegal export of elephant ivory (*Being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of a restriction on the exportation of goods, contrary to section 170(2)(b) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 – Fined £750 plus £265 costs*)
- Worth £20,000 to £30,000

2013

- 10 seizures; 18 units; 11.5 kg
- Three x fraudulently evading a restriction on export of goods – selling ivory on eBay described as ox bone (*Being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of a restriction on the exportation of goods, contrary to section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. Fined £555*)
- Eight seizures; 228 units; 4.975 kg

October - December 2013/2014

- 12 seizures; two units; 25.15 kg

2014

- 1,141 legal ivory items (*UK exports these ivory pieces to Hong Kong. Even if these items are exported legally as antique, there is no proof of documentation mentioned in the article, and this potentially legal trade could still fuel the Asian demand for ivory*)
- Selling and keeping for sale ivory, whale and dolphin bone, marine turtle shell (*Regulation 8(1) COTES referring to EU Wildlife Trade Regulations Article 8 (App 1). Fined £750, £550 costs, £75 victim surcharge*)
- 10 kg of worked ivory (*Ivory detected in a courier package. The items were subject to a controlled delivery in France*)
- Sale of one carved ivory ornament

2009 - 2014

- 1,165 ivory products, out of 2,853 seizures made

2015

- 182 seizures; 250 kg
- 161 seizures; 64 kg (*Items being shipped from the UK to China by postal parcels, one of them containing 22 kg of ivory. Findings of the UK Border Force (UKBF)*)
- 2,524 **legal** ivory items (*UK exports these ivory pieces to Hong Kong. Even if these items are exported legally as antique, there is no proof of documentation mentioned in the article, and this potentially legal trade could still fuel the Asian demand for ivory*)
- Trophy 2ft 4in (69cm) (*The ‘unworked’ ivory was about to be sold illegally*)
- 22 items (*Sold online on eBay by an individual who pretended the ivory items were pre-1947*)
- Nine pieces (*Seized by the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit and Cumbria Police*)
- 22 kg (*Detected at a mail centre based on a risk assessment. Detected in a postal parcel*)
- 110 kg, including tusks, carved bangles and beads (*Seizure at Heathrow: abandoned baggage in transit from Angola and destined for Germany*)

United Kingdom ivory seizure breakdown

2016

- 43 ivory pieces (*Enquiries conducted with eBay revealed that over a two-year period XI sold 78 ivory items valued at £6,408; of these, 59 items valued at £4,881 were exported outside the EU*)
- Offering for sale two hippo incisors, one sperm whale tooth, five pieces of elephant ivory (including four tusks) (*Regulation 8(1) of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (COTES) (Enforcement) Regulations. £1,500 fine*)
- Offering for sale one ivory elephant tusk ornament (considered unworked) (*Christie's Auction House violated Regulation 8(1) COTES Regulations £3,250 fine, £85 costs, £120 victim surcharge*)
- Three lots of ivory (*A HAMILTON auctioneering firm have been fined £1,500 for offering elephant ivory for sale*)
- Offering for sale elephant ivory tusk ornament considered unworked (*Regulation 8(1) COTES Regulations. Conditional discharge, £620 costs, £15 victim surcharge*)
- Shane David Ball kept and offered elephant ivory for sale (*Regulation 8(1) COTES Regulations. Seven months' imprisonment, suspended for 18 months, 10-day rehabilitation course, £1,134 costs for forensic tests*)
- Indian tusk, mounted on a silver pedestal, valued £1,200 to £1,800
- 43 ivory items, including seven unworked (*Regulation 8(1) COTES Regulations, being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of a restriction on the importation of goods, contrary to section 170 Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. One-year imprisonment suspended for two years, 150 hours unpaid work, victim surcharge £85, costs £85*)



Ivory ban exemptions

Any EU-wide ivory ban should consider a few key exemptions: IFAW would like to see a ban that stops all solid ivory items being bought and sold across all member states, with consideration given to a few key exemptions:

- 1. Museums** being allowed to acquire, display, swap and exchange collections around the world (so exhibits and individual items can travel and items can be saved for posterity)
- 2. Antique furniture** which contains less than 5% ivory and less than 200 grams (normally small inlays). This would need certification from relevant management authorities (as most furniture is easy to date and should be antique)
- 3. Exemptions for 'antique' miniature paintings** which were painted on thin slithers of ivory prior to 1900, which could be self-certified by the antiques trade (most were painted between the 17th and 19th Century and no new ones are painted on ivory today)
- 4. Musical instruments** which may contain ivory which is less than 5% of the item and less than 200 grams (similar to the US exemption), so instruments can be taken abroad, bought or sold. This may include ivory used on bows, valves, ivory piano keys and bagpipes, but named exemptions for certain instruments which may contain up to 270 grams of ivory such as bagpipes and pianos. This exemption should not include instruments which have massive ivory veneers which cover more than 5% of the surface area of the instrument.
- 5. Saving items of significant historical importance**, which will have to be verified through a radiocarbon dating test and then approved by an independent expert panel, to make sure that only items which are of significant historical importance can be bought or sold and saved for the nation. This will allow museums to buy items from within their country or abroad or from those countries which do not have a ban, to protect and conserve these items for posterity. This expert panel should be composed of people from a number of notable institutions; for example, representatives from institutions such as the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum and a notable art expert etc.

These exemptions would help create a workable ban to protect elephants, minimise the impact on the antiques trade and prevent solid ivory items being bought and sold in the UK.

Appendix 2

Elephant statistics from the Great Elephant Census

Topline

1. In Gabon, in one national park (Minkébé National Park) scientists recorded an **81.5% decline** in elephant numbers over 10 years
2. Savanna elephant populations **declined by 30%** (equal to 144,000 elephants) between 2007 and 2014 (Great Elephant Census)
3. Mozambique: There was a rapid population **decline of 53%** in five years
4. Tanzania: There was a rapid population **decline of 60%** in five years
5. Zimbabwe: Within one specific area, the Sebungwe region, **populations had decreased by 74%**
6. The current rate of decline overall in elephant populations is **8% per year, primarily due to poaching**. If the current trend continues, we could see the global elephant population drop to 160,000 by 2025

In more detail

In Gabon, Minkébé National Park was considered one of the most critical sanctuaries for forest elephants and used to hold the highest densities of elephants in Central Africa. Unfortunately, this situation has changed drastically; **scientists recorded an 81.5% decline in elephant numbers over 10 years.**

While the park harboured a population of 35,404 elephants in 2004, by 2014 figures had dropped to 6,542 elephants





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