

Zimbabwe wants to sell ivory stash to fund elephant conservation

Written by Administrator
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Jane Flanagan 18/05/2022

Zimbabwe has opened vaults containing 135 tonnes of ivory and rhino horn as it called for the guarded stockpile to be sold to fund the conservation of its growing and “dangerous” elephant population.

A “one-off sale” of the cache, seized from smugglers and poachers, and harvested from carcasses found in the country’s national parks, would raise £500 million, and all of the proceeds would go towards wildlife management, the government said.

The [sale of ivory has been banned](#) since 1989 by Cites, the international body that monitors endangered species.

The Zimbabwean government has warned that it may resort to [culling its 100,000-strong elephant population](#), which it

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claimed is double the capacity of its overwhelmed parks.

“Where do we get the money to look after the resources?” asked Fulton Mangwanya, head of the parks and wildlife agency, as he showed the towering piles of ivory to a group of visiting ambassadors. He told them there was a “great market” for the ivory.

Lockdowns during the pandemic and bans on international travel have hammered Zimbabwe’s tourism industry, the parks chief said, leaving little budget for anti-poaching costs and supporting communities “bearing the brunt” of living near destructive elephants.

“We need assistance. These elephants are multiplying at a dangerous rate: 5 per cent per annum,” Mangwanya said, attempting to convince diplomats from Britain and Europe to back an easing of restrictions. He added that each adult elephant eats about 300lb of fruit, grasses and bark a day, and the burgeoning population was making it harder for other animals to find food.

Zimbabwe will host an “elephant summit” for officials from 14 African countries, as well as China and Japan, this month to discuss strategies to manage wildlife and lobby for continental support to make money from ivory stocks.

Its neighbour [Botswana](#) , where elephant tusk trophy hunters were recently allowed to return,

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has also argued that it is overpopulated with elephants and selling its ivory stocks is necessary for conservation. The two countries are home to 230,000 elephants — more than half of Africa's total population.

Despite the bans, the illegal trade in ivory and rhino horn continues, mostly driven by demand in Asia, where tusks are turned into trinkets and [rhino horn is used in a range of remedies](#) . The criminal trade is responsible for the slaughter of an estimated 50 elephants a day. Rising poverty and a loss of tourism jobs and income has made it easier for international smuggling gangs to recruit local poachers, conservationists say.

A previous attempt to overturn the Cites trade ban failed, exposing differences in opinion between Africa's elephant-holding states. Gabon, Mali and Kenya were among many of the continent's dissenters and Kenya's decision in 2016 to [burn stockpiles of ivory](#) and horn, gathered from 6,000 elephants and 343 rhinos, was its attempt to show that only tusks carried by a living elephant had any value.