

# Enforcement methods and tools for the elephant ivory

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**SUMMARY:** After the explorations and the conquest of the African and Asian continents, the trade of ivory got at unsustainable levels, leading the number of African and Indian elephants to a considerable decrease. Since 1973 the Indian elephant is included in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild fauna and flora (CITES), while the African elephant was included in 1989. In 1997, in Harare, during the X<sup>o</sup> International Conference of CITES, the African elephant has been down listed from Appendix I to Appendix II for some African countries: Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Several government and environmental organisations and different monitoring projects check the demographic situation of elephants. Nevertheless, illegal trafficking of ivory keeps on increasing as the customer demand increases. The main international routes of the illegal traffic of ivory involve above all countries like China and Japan, often transiting through European countries. From the recent years data analysis of the specimens seized at the main Italian ports and airports by personnel of Corpo forestale dello Stato (tusks, raw and worked, statues, necklaces), it resulted a trend consisting in illegal introduction of ivory following a non-EU Community passenger, coming from countries as Cameroun, China, Congo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, Thailandia. In these last years also the trade of mammoth tusks has become flourishing, because it is not illegal; therefore scientific methods (study of Schreger lines and angles, etc.) have been applied to distinguish ivory of extinct species from ivory of living species and they became very important and useful tools to prevent the renewal of illegal ivory trade.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the explorations and the conquest of African and Asian continents, the trade of ivory got at unsustainable levels, leading the number of African and Indian elephants to a considerable decrease.

Since 1973, including the Indian elephant in Appendix I and subsequently, in 1989, the African elephant too, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild fauna and flora (CITES) has looked like saving the elephants, that were in risk of extinction for illegal-hunting.

In 1997, in Harare, during the X<sup>o</sup> International Conference of CITES, the African elephant has been down listed from Appendix I to Appendix II for some African countries: Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

The demographic situation about elephants

has been checked, during recent years, by several government and environmental organisations and by different monitoring projects. For example, in February 1999, the project MIKE (Monitoring Illegal Killing of Elephants) was approved to clash the illegal trade of ivory. At the beginning of 2000 the MIKE and the ETIS (Elephant Trade Information System) have become operative, helping the CITES and preventing a renewal of ivory traffic.

## 2. DISCUSSION

Nevertheless, illegal trade of ivory keeps on. As far as the ivory seizures made in Italy are concerned, from the analysis of data related to the ivory specimens introduced into the Judiciary Storage of the Seized and Confiscated specimens of Corpo Forestale dello Stato (Figs. 1, 2), it resulted that the irregulari-



Fig.1 - Ivory seized by Corpo Forestale dello Stato.



Fig.2 - Cawed ivory seized by Corpo Forestale dello Stato.

ties detected at the time of introduction in Italy reduced, going from the 392 infractions of the period 1993-1996 to 82 infractions of the period 1997-2000.

On one side, that trend is justified by the increased knowledge of the CITES and the national law disposals, even if it do not means that illegal traffic of ivory is disappearing.

In fact, in this analysis it is important to consider that in the international frame of the illegal trade in wildlife specimens, a lot of other fashions appeared besides ivory, and above all, as the control increased, the illegal traffic routes, changed, also for ivory, taking advantage of the progressive abatement of customs

barriers among the European Community States. Therefore the points of introduction increased besides the national border and the investigative action on the territory shall be more and more ultranational.

From 1999 to the first months of 2001, at the main Italian ports and airports, personnel of Corpo forestale dello Stato seized about 300 specimens of elephant ivory, of the *Loxodonta africana* species, generally tusks, raw and worked, stutues, necklaces (Figs. 3, 4), for an amount of 250 kilos.

From the data analysis, it resulted a trend consisting in illegal introduction of ivory following a non -EU Community passenger, coming from



Fig.3 - Tusks and ivory figurines seized by Corpo Forestale dello Stato.



Fig.4 - Ivory necklaces and tusks seized by Corpo Forestale dello Stato.

countries such as Cameroun, China, Congo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, South Africa, Thailandia.

With regard to the other European Union Member States, like France and United Kingdom, Italy has not a particular active market in the field of ivory products, and in fact the introduction and sale of ivory is concentrated in the above mentioned two countries.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The illegal trafficking increases as the customer demand increases. In fact, the main international routes of the illegal traffic of

ivory, showed up by the large quantities seized, involve above all countries like China and Japan, often transiting through European countries, as it is herewith indicated: Nigeria – Taiwan (April 1998, 1,5 ton), Nigeria – China – via Moscow (April 1999, 0,5 ton), Cameroun – China – via Paris (October 1998, 600 kg), Cameroun – China – via Kenya (August 1999, 700 kg), Angola – Portugal (February 2000, 150 kg), South Africa – China (January 1999, 2 ton), South Africa – China – via Lisbona (October 1999, 1,5 ton), Kenya – Dubai (September 1999, 2 ton), Rwanda – Japon – via Paris (December 1999, 420 kg).

In these last years also the trade of mammoth

tusks has become flourishing, because it is not illegal. These tusks are imported especially from East Europe (Siberia and Russia) and the North of United States (Alaska). Therefore, the poachers often cheat several States trading illegal ivory disguised as legal ivory; selling, in this way, an enormous quantity of elephant tusks.

In Italy, the illegal trade of ivory is still flourishing, and then it is seem considerably useful to inquire into scientific methods to distinguish ivory of extinct species from ivory of living species.

The study of Schreger lines and angles has been very important to single out two different patterns for allow CITES (and other customs examination) to prevent the renewal of illegal trade ivory. Also identification techniques to distinguish ivory from substitutive substances of ivory were studied and applied.

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