



# 2017 INTERIM REPORT



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# The Elephant Crisis Fund



**T**he current elephant crisis began in 2008-10 with a massive increase in poaching of African elephants, driven primarily by increasing demand for ivory from China. Since then, elephant numbers have declined substantially and it is likely that 20-30% of Africa's elephants have been lost. While in the long-term elephants are increasingly challenged by human-elephant conflict and habitat loss, it is the intensity and immediacy of the poaching crisis that requires an urgent and coordinated response.

The Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF), a joint initiative of Save the Elephants (STE) and the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), was established in May 2013 to tackle the elephant crisis by providing funding to stop the killing of elephants, and to stop the trafficking and the demand for ivory. We recognized that this crisis had reached such a level that no single institution could end it alone. Elephants needed a coalition of effective organizations to implement strategic projects on the ground rapidly and efficiently.

The ECF is willing to fund any organization doing good work on elephant protection in priority areas, enabling institutions large and small, international

and local, to have access to emergency and innovation funding to address the elephant crisis. The ECF is nimble and efficient, with 100% of donated funds going directly to actions to save elephants, zero overhead, and rapid decision-making.

Supporters can rest assured that all funds go to effective projects and institutions, as each is assessed for its potential impact using Save the Elephants' deep knowledge of elephant populations and African conservation organizations and its extensive network of contacts, backed up by field visits. To date, the ECF has funded 145 projects and 49 grantees in 29 different countries across Africa and Asia.

**Stop the Killing, Stop the Trafficking, and Stop the Demand.** The world has united around this strategy to save elephants from the scourge of the ivory crisis. The Elephant Crisis Fund has been a catalytic investor in each component. In the following pages we are pleased to present a report on the status of elephants in Africa today, and a summary of the impact our partners have made with support from the Elephant Crisis Fund.

# Continental Situation Update



Photo credit: Robbie Labanowski

By Dr. Chris Thouless  
Director of the Elephant Crisis Fund

**A**t the heart of the elephant crisis is the demand for ivory in Asia. There has been encouraging progress in China, the country where the demand is highest. In early 2017 the Chinese government implemented the first stage in its ban of the domestic ivory trade, which was announced at the end of last year. Twelve carving facilities were closed at the end of March 2017, and the rest of the retail outlets are due to close at the end of 2017.

We believe that this is one of the reasons for the decline in the price of ivory in China, from a peak of \$2,100 per kg in 2013 to \$730 per kg early this year. This price drop is good news, as it reduces the financial incentives for traffickers. However, we have yet to see an impact on poaching levels and the price is still much higher than it was before the start of the current elephant crisis.

With the loss of mainland China's legal markets, we expect an increase in activity in neighboring countries (particularly Hong Kong, Vietnam, and Myanmar) where Chinese tourists and traders already buy ivory and smuggle it back to mainland China.

In Hong Kong it is legal to sell ivory dating from before the ban on international trade, but newer, poached ivory is being laundered and sold as old ivory. If traders are to be convicted for possession of illegal ivory, it needs to be proved that what they are selling is new. In March 2017 there was a ground-breaking case in which two men were convicted for the illegal possession and sale of elephant ivory. A carbon-14 aging technique refined by ECF partner Thure Cerling was used to prove that the ivory in a pair of chopsticks was new, obtained after 1990, and was therefore illegal to sell. Unfortunately, the two men received paltry fines of \$770 and \$1,000, far less than the maximum possible.

Despite this positive news from China, large amounts of ivory are still leaving the African continent, as shown by the seizure of 7.2 tons of ivory in Hong Kong in early July 2017. Improved law enforcement has reduced flows of ivory through Tanzanian ports over the last two years, but large shipments are still going through Mozambique. Additionally, a massive stockpile that had accumulated in Burundi since the 1980s has been pilfered and is now in trade.

The port of Mombasa in Kenya has been a major weak point for trafficking, with poor law enforcement allowing ivory from all over East Africa to exit for Asia. Some recent successes have helped to disrupt the networks operating out of Mombasa, making it less attractive for trafficking. After the conviction and 20-year prison sentence of ivory trafficker Feisal Ali Mohamed last year, the Akasha brothers, believed to be senior members of his network, were sent to the U.S for trial after two years of fighting extradition.

ECF partners in Uganda have had success with recent arrests of suspects who appear to be connected to a transcontinental smuggling ring. While there has been much disruption of trafficking networks in East Africa, there are disturbing signs of an increase in activity in West African countries such as Nigeria, which is a hub for the movement of ivory from gravely threatened forest elephant populations, as shown in the report on

ECF-funded work by the Environmental Investigation Agency, published in July 2017.

Again, we are not yet seeing signs that poachers are being discouraged by lower prices for ivory or disrupted trafficking routes. Even in countries such as Kenya, where it seemed that the situation was coming under control, there have been local outbreaks, including the killing of another of the “big tuskers” of Tsavo National Park and an increase in poaching in northern Kenya, possibly related to the ongoing drought and large scale movements of heavily armed pastoralists. This has caused a local breakdown of law and order, providing cover for poachers.

The situation in Niassa National Reserve in northern Mozambique is still serious, most protected areas in Zambia are experiencing an upturn in poaching, there is still heavy pressure on the last refuge for forest elephants in Gabon, and there have been recent poaching incidents in Chad and in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Across the sites being monitored by the Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants program, there was a small reduction in the poaching rate from 2015 to 2016, but it is still at a level at which elephant populations across the continent will continue to decline.



Photo credit: Chris Thouless / Save the Elephants

# Nine Key Elements of the Elephant Crisis Fund



## **ONE GOAL**

The Elephant Crisis Fund's only goal is to end the ivory crisis.

## **100% TO ELEPHANT CONSERVATION**

All funds raised go to the most effective partners and projects in the field. Even bank transfer fees are paid by the Wildlife Conservation Network, separately from donations, ensuring every cent of every dollar donated for elephants goes to elephants.

## **COLLABORATION**

No single organization can solve this global problem. The ECF is focused on ending the ivory poaching crisis through uniting diverse actors into concerted action for wildlife. Only together can we save elephants.

## **IDEAS, NOT INSTITUTIONS**

The ECF seeks out the best and most urgent initiatives to address the ivory crisis, regardless of who presents them. We support the proposals with the most potential, no matter if they come from large-scale international organizations or local field operations.

## **DATA-DRIVEN**

Save the Elephants is at the heart of scientific understanding of elephants and their status. With 50 years of field experience and a wide network of contacts to call upon, the ECF is able to target strategic priorities.

## **PIONEERING**

The ECF supports innovation and shares successful concepts with other partners and projects. Examples of such innovation include GPS tracking technologies, ivory DNA analysis, and courtroom monitoring.

## **RANGE-WIDE FOCUS**

We believe that elephant conservation is not just about numbers; we are concerned about the conservation of small, but regionally significant, populations as well as large populations.

## **RAPID RESPONSE**

Gaps in financing and delays in the receipt of big grants can sabotage conservation efforts and sometimes there are urgent needs that cannot be met by conventional donors. The ECF can deploy emergency funds within 24 hours.

## **MINIMAL BUREAUCRACY**

We use our unparalleled practical knowledge to find the best partners to support. We rely on this knowledge and field-based due diligence to solicit vetted, targeted projects and ensure paperwork is minimized.

# Financial Statement



**W**e are pleased to report that the Elephant Crisis Fund has raised almost \$12 million since its launch in May 2013 and, with your help, we've raised over \$580,000 in 2017 alone (as of May 15, 2017). Our goal is to raise a total of \$15 million by May 2018.

As of May 15, 2017, a total of \$10,011,148 had been allocated towards the most urgent and innovative elephant conservation projects, with the remainder of the funds in the process of being allocated to projects under review, and a small reserve held for emergencies.

The allocation towards different project categories is as follows:

- \$4,904,418** *Anti-poaching projects*
- \$2,880,913** *Anti-trafficking projects*
- \$796,510** *Projects with both anti-poaching & anti-trafficking components*
- \$1,429,307** *Demand reduction projects*

There is a pipeline of critical projects under development and Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network continue their mission to raise further support to ensure the funding of these crucial actions.

# Project Updates



# Anti-Poaching

**G**aramba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) faces one of the most severe poaching threats on the continent. It is located in an unstable country with heavily armed poachers coming from within the DRC itself, from Sudan, South Sudan and the Central African Republic. The ECF has continued to support African Parks, which has managed Garamba since 2006, and has persisted in holding the line against poaching, despite losing many rangers and an attack that wounded the park manager last year.

African Parks has employed a new General Manager, John Barrett, with a distinguished military background, and has continued to develop an integrated approach to law enforcement. This has, however, been further complicated by the influx of refugees fleeing the civil war just across the border in South Sudan and the return of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). We have supported African Parks' establishment of an intelligence unit, which collects and analyzes all available information sources, to ensure that law enforcement action is intelligence driven. Twenty-five poachers and traffickers were arrested in the first three months of 2017.

The Wildlife Conservation Society has also been developing an intelligence-led approach to law enforcement in Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in northern Congo, with support from the ECF. This links an informant network managed by a Wildlife Crime Unit (WCU) to a new operational control center and a Rapid Reaction Unit, and makes sure that wildlife crime cases are properly managed in the courts. The WCU has five undercover investigators who gather and verify information from a growing number of informants. Increasingly, these investigators are infiltrating the top target poaching rings in the area.

During the course of the year, the WCU has partnered with the highly mobile and newly trained Rapid Reaction Unit, which provides the capacity for seizure, interdiction, and arrest. To date, WCU investigations have directly led to the arrest of 27 individuals and the confiscation of 14 weapons and 158 kg (almost 350 lbs) of ivory. Finally, the WCU legal branch has presented a total of 24 cases to the local court. Ten cases have resulted in conviction and sentences of up



Photo credit: Forrest Hogg / WCS

Seized ivory and ammunition at Nouabale-Ndoki National Park.

to five years, marking a significant step forward for wildlife crime justice and conservation in northern Congo.

Poaching levels in Zambia are still high, but because automatic weapons are seldom used, elephant populations are not being driven down as fast as in some other countries. ECF grantee, Conservation Lower Zambezi, was concerned about the increase in poaching in Zambia's Lower Zambezi National Park and needed advice on how to respond. The ECF provided an anti-poaching expert, who visited the area and developed a number of recommendations. He identified the main problem as lack of law enforcement presence on the remote northern boundary and suggested establishing a Rapid Reaction Unit and covert observation posts in that area. Both are being established thanks to an ECF grant.

North Luangwa National Park, which is co-managed by the Frankfurt Zoological Society, is one of the best managed protected areas in Zambia. While security within the park itself is generally good, elephant populations in the neighboring Game Management Areas are under threat. Efforts to protect the elephants in these areas include training new community game scouts and fitting satellite collars to elephants so that the scouts can be deployed in the vicinity of the elephants.



Photo credit: Francois d'Elbée

The dog unit in Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia, has been established to disrupt wildlife trafficking from Zambia to Malawi and Mozambique. The dogs are trained to track poachers and find ivory, bushmeat, ammunition, pangolin scales and firearms.

In the last few years the elephants of northern Zimbabwe have been hard hit by poaching, with losses of up to 75% of elephants in some areas. The current economic crisis in Zimbabwe has made it very difficult for government authorities to provide effective protection. The ECF has been supporting the Zambezi Society to provide backup services to park authorities, particularly in the Mana Pools area. There appears to have been a reduction in poaching here over the last year.

The ECF funded a project supporting the isolated elephant population in the Chari region in Chad by fitting elephants with radio collars to allow law enforcement authorities to follow them and provide close protection. Unfortunately, the project was established too late to help. At least eleven elephants from a small population of approximately 150 were poached in February and others were badly injured. Furthermore, the collaring operation planned for April was cancelled because the Environment Ministry did not give permission to implement it. These two

setbacks mean hope for this beleaguered population is fading.

The situation in Niassa National Reserve, which holds the largest remaining elephant population in Mozambique, remains challenging. Elephants continue to be killed at a terrible rate. Reserve management is constrained by a number of factors, including the lack of sufficient resources, the presence of many human settlements in the reserve, poor communications infrastructure, and an unstable political climate. There have been several attacks on conservationist camps, and the head of operations for the Wildlife Conservation Society was shot and wounded in an ambush. The Elephant Crisis Fund is supporting the upgrading of the radio system, and Save the Elephants has provided its tracking app to help park staff follow and protect collared elephants, but there is still much to be done before we can be certain that the tide has turned against the poachers.



Photo credit: Frank af Petersens



Photo credit: Frank af Petersens

Protecting elephants in rainforests such as in Odzala-Kokoua National Park in the Congo is extremely difficult because rangers have to patrol through dense vegetation and swamps, with no road access. The ECF has funded the establishment of new ranger posts to allow easier coverage of the park, together with ranger training and equipment.



**C**urrently, Gabon is one of the major poaching and trafficking hotspots in Africa. Located in Central Africa, Gabon holds the largest surviving population of forest elephants and is under assault by poachers coming across the border from Cameroon. The ECF is supporting the Gabonese national parks agency in their anti-trafficking work, but the country needs to approve a new penal code before effective action can be taken against trafficking networks.

Gabonese ivory moves through other countries, and there have been some recent successes in convicting traffickers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo. The ECF supported the Lusaka Agreement Task Force and Freeland in their investigation of the seizure of 2.1 tons of ivory in Thailand in 2015 and 1.5 tons seized in Vietnam in 2014. A customs officer and shipping company manager from DRC were arrested in connection with these seizures and were brought to court in February 2017. They were denied bail and it is hoped that they will receive exemplary sentences.

With support from the Elephant Crisis Fund, the Natural Resource Conservation Network (NRCN), a

member of the EAGLE network, has made further arrests in Uganda. These have led to the discovery of a large multinational trafficking network based in Uganda which is now under active investigation in collaboration with the Uganda Wildlife Authority, Uganda Police Force, and other partners. There was a seizure of 250 kg (550 lbs) of ivory in Kampala on September 15, 2016 together with the arrest of two suspects brought about by NRCN and assisted by police from the Flying Squad. The two suspects have been found guilty and are currently on remand awaiting sentencing.

A Guinean national, Bangaly Kourouma, who has been the subject of a long-term investigation by NRCN, was thought to be connected to this group. Kourouma was arrested by NRCN in January 2016 in possession of 12 kg (26 lbs) of ivory, but skipped police bond and returned to his home country of Guinea in West Africa. In February 2017 he travelled back to Uganda, so NRCN worked quickly with the Flying Squad to search the apartment in Kampala where he was staying.



Photo credit: Natural Resource Conservation Network

Bangaly Kourouma arrested in February 2017.

Kourouma was arrested along with a fellow Guinean national and a Liberian; in the apartment there were 437 pieces of raw ivory weighing 1,304 kg (2,872 lbs). He has been charged with unlawful possession, illegal importing of restricted goods, and money laundering.

Authorities can gather intelligence and find evidence of ivory trafficking in many ways. In airports, they use sniffer dogs to indicate if a passenger is smuggling contraband. The Uganda Wildlife Authority sniffer dog unit's springer spaniels (supported by the ECF, Stop Ivory, Maisha, and the Wildlife Conservation Society) are in their first few months of operation and have been highly effective. Between February 17 and April 17, 2017 the dog unit detected 19 passengers carrying ivory bangles, as well as hippo teeth, pangolin scales, and other wildlife products.

Given that the dogs cannot be on duty 24 hours a day, leaving many other cases undetected, this suggests that small scale trafficking may add up to be a significant contribution to the trade, and that hand luggage is a significant weak point. Addis Ababa airport in Ethiopia is considered one of the biggest points of ivory leakage on the African continent, but it does not yet have a sniffer dog unit on site, a gap we hope will be filled soon.

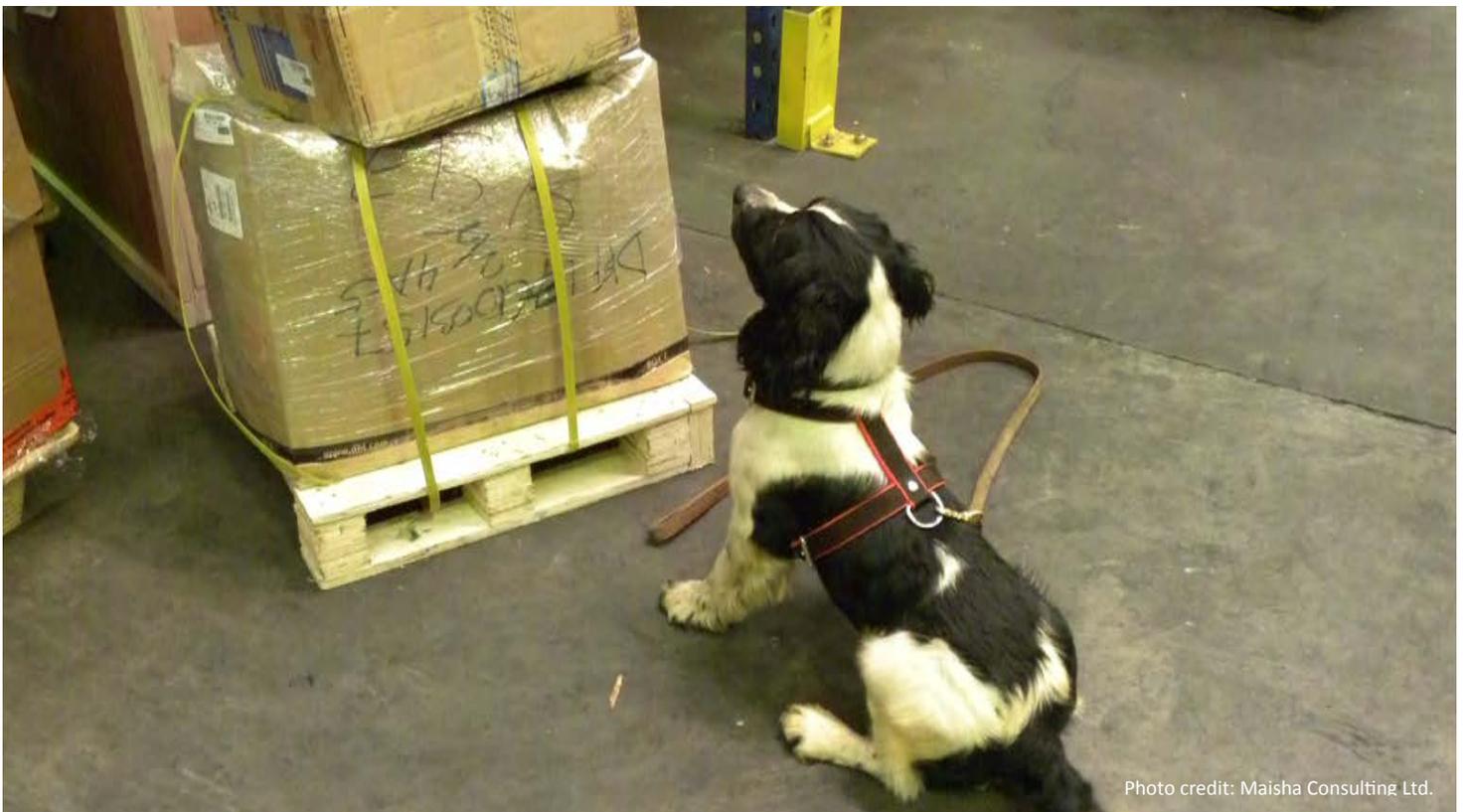


Photo credit: Maisha Consulting Ltd.

A Springer Spaniel sniffer dog in training at Entebbe Airport, Uganda.

# Demand Reduction

The most significant development in demand reduction occurred on December 29, 2016 when the Chinese government announced they would ban all ivory trade and processing activities in China by the end of 2017. The commercial processing of ivory was scheduled to stop by March 31, 2017 and all registered traders would then be phased out, bringing a full halt to the market by the end of the year. On March 31, 2017 China closed 12 licensed ivory factories (out of 34) and 55 retail ivory shops (out of 143). The remainder are to be closed by the end of 2017. ECF grantee, the Natural Resources Defense Council, has been very effective behind the scenes providing advice to the Chinese government on the practical steps required in implementing the ban.

A report published by Save the Elephants in February 2017 showed that the price of ivory in markets across China had dropped from \$2,100 per kg in early 2014 to \$730 per kg in February 2017, an encouraging sign that demand was declining. Part of the reason for this price reduction was thought to be a reaction to the Chinese government's announcement of the ivory ban. Other factors include an economic slowdown in China, resulting in fewer people being able to afford luxury goods, and a crackdown on corruption that has dissuaded business people from buying expensive ivory items as 'favors' for government officials. The licensed outlets in China have gradually been reducing the quantity of ivory items on display, and recently have been cutting prices to improve sales, the report says.

With the closing down of the legal ivory markets in China, we are expecting an increase in illegal (mostly internet-based) sales in China and legal sales in Hong Kong and a further increase in sales in neighboring countries, particularly Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar. Sales in these countries are mostly illegal but there is little or no law enforcement. Since most of these sales are made to traveling Chinese nationals, rather than locals, conventional consumer-focused campaigns in these countries are unlikely to be effective, so the focus should be encouraging governments to close down markets and confiscating ivory at border crossing points.

The Hong Kong government is now developing legislation to ban its ivory trade over a five-year period. A major priority now is to ensure that the traders do

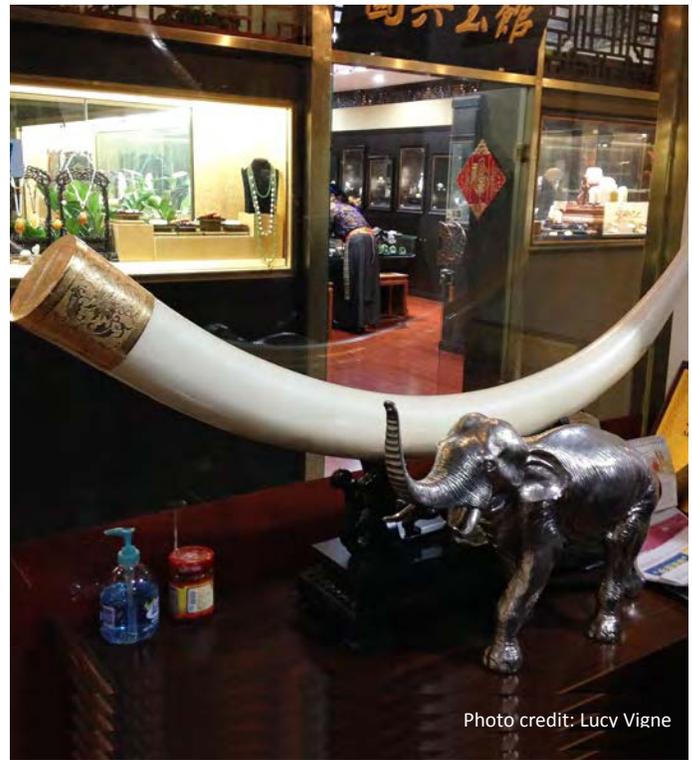


Photo credit: Lucy Vigne

Chinese ivory retail outlet.

not derail this process, particularly in the quest for compensation for existing stocks. This will go through a prolonged process including public consultation, a committee review, and finally a vote by the Legislative Council early next year. There is a strong rear-guard action against the passage of this bill, so the ECF is supporting WWF Hong Kong and WildAid in their public relations campaigns aimed at ensuring public support for legislation and lobbying of key undecided members of the Legislative Council.

Vietnam was identified as a major market for illegal ivory sales by Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin, consultants commissioned by the Elephant Crisis Fund. The findings in their 2016 report on a survey of Vietnamese retail outlets had a significant impact on getting the Vietnamese government to accept that there was a problem with illegal ivory sales within the country. However, ensuring effective law enforcement is difficult, so the ECF is supporting WildAid in their campaign to encourage the Vietnamese government to clamp down on illegal sales.



Photo credit: Wild Aid

Vietnamese celebrities Pham Huong and Le Hang with Samburu moran (warriors) in Kenya during the filming of a TV documentary on elephants and the ivory trade to raise awareness in Vietnam.

Vigne and Martin have also carried out investigations in Laos, which has grown to become one of the largest illegal ivory markets in the world, with almost no enforcement of the law against trading ivory. Vientiane, the capital of Laos, had the most outlets and ivory items seen for sale, but other hotspots are springing up throughout the country. In the northwest region bordering Thailand and Myanmar, is Kings Romans [sic], a relatively new Chinese-owned casino catering to rich Chinese and Thai gamblers. The casino has several shops selling new ivory items which are mostly machine processed objects that are sold more cheaply than in China.

This May, consultant Lucy Vigne returned from a visit to Khartoum, Sudan, where she carried out the first survey of retail outlets since 2005. There is still much worked ivory, including obviously new items, openly for sale in curio shops in Khartoum. They are primarily

sold to Chinese workers who buy machine-processed pieces far cheaper than at home. Fresh looking tusks from young elephants were seen in several shops, demonstrating one of the most upsetting aspects of the ivory crisis: poachers now kill indiscriminately, including elephant calves with tiny tusks.

Lucy Vigne also conducted an ivory survey in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in April 2017. During their survey in 2008, Vigne and Martin found ivory being sold in 44 shops. Since then, there has been a clamp down on ivory sales, the Chinese embassy has produced a local publicity campaign telling Chinese workers that ivory is forbidden, and increased enforcement at Addis Ababa airport has made it risky to smuggle ivory back to China. On her visit this April, Vigne did not find a single ivory item displayed for sale in any retail outlet in the city.

# Stories From The Field



# Snapshot From Garamba



The carcasses of the nine elephants were scattered along a stretch of riverbed.

**O**n May 3, 2017 rangers heard high velocity gunshots in Garamba National Park, a 1,900 square mile UNESCO World Heritage site in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their fears were quickly confirmed by an aerial patrol: nine fresh elephant carcasses were lying on the banks of the Garamba river. Poachers had already removed the tusks from two of these elephants. The rangers—who are employed by ECF grantee African Parks – knew the poachers would want to return for the rest, and so established an overwatch position overlooking the carcasses. That night the poachers did indeed return for the rest of the ivory, but were instead met by a hail of bullets. The rangers’ ambush wounded one of the poachers but the rest got away.

In the aftermath of this confrontation, rangers began investigations of the site, discovering a discarded teacup close to one of the elephants whose tusks were removed. The cup was significant because it was typical of poachers from the Sahel, a region about a thousand kilometers away, an indication that poachers were coming from far away to get to Garamba’s elephants.

Just one day later a gang of 13 Congolese poachers were discovered by a different foot patrol in the west of the Park. These two incidents were further proof that heavily armed militia and rogue nomadic groups were preying on the park from all sides. Indeed, Garamba is in one of the most volatile, perilous stretches of territory on the continent. This has taken a terrible toll on the elephants there whose numbers, estimated at 22,000 in the 1960s, have been reduced to around a thousand.

Last year, three rangers and military personnel were killed defending Garamba National Park against poachers. And just in April 2017, African Parks lost two more men when ranger Joel Merino Ari and Sergeant Gerome Bolimola Afokao were killed during a shootout while confronting Sudanese poaches removing tusks from freshly slaughtered elephants. The dead rangers left behind 11 children without fathers.



Photo credit: Chris Thouless / Save the Elephants

Rangers being trained at Garamba.

African Parks is working to end this destruction by putting in place highly experienced ex-military leaders who are training rangers in advanced tactics and skills. Soon their efforts will be strengthened when an eight-man helicopter arrives to enable rapid deployment of the newly equipped and trained rangers.

Ensuring rangers have all the resources they need to fend off poaching is paramount to their success. One of their most important resources is data. Data helps investigators understand these wildlife crimes better. In the May 3, 2017 crime scene in Garamba, investigators collected elephant DNA for forensic testing and gathered the spent rounds of ammunition to help build a pattern that could distinguish these criminals.

Alongside data, a comprehensive intelligence strategy is also key. In Garamba, the Elephant Crisis Fund is supporting the establishment of an intelligence capacity in the park designed to gain a better understanding of the regional poaching threats and the modus operandi of armed groups.

“Garamba is not like any other park—you have very complex regional situations with poachers coming from sometimes hundreds of miles away, and inherently you get these unstable regions feeding criminal activity including poaching. Every year something new comes through Garamba and we have to be prepared for whatever it is.”

Garamba’s Intelligence Manager Naftali Honig

For decades Garamba has been forced to combat poaching. With a better knowledge of the environment and the poachers, coupled with improved training and intelligence, African Parks now has a chance of gaining the upper hand. They are now moving towards a situation where poaching can be disrupted in the park before it starts, reducing the loss of both rangers and elephants.

# The Downfall of a Notorious Smuggling Family

**T**hey must have felt untouchable. For two years, two brothers from the notorious Akasha crime family from Mombasa, Kenya, had bribed and threatened their way around the drug-smuggling charges against them. Those same tactics enabled them to impede the U.S. government's requests to extradite them for their international drug trafficking crimes.

Wildlife trafficking appears to have been a side business for the Akasha brothers, bringing in small revenues compared to what they made from their main heroin routes through Afghanistan. But the quantities of ivory they were trafficking were catastrophic for elephants. The Akashas were linked to the seizure of up to 30 tons of ivory, playing their part in turning Mombasa into one of the biggest trans-shipment points for ivory heading to Asia.

Things changed for the Akashas on the night of January 29, 2017. Security forces stormed a house in Mombasa, apprehending the two brothers and two of their accomplices. Soon they were in custody and heading back to New York with the agents who had engineered their arrest. Two days later they were in front of the judges of the Southern District of Manhattan to confront the consequences of their crimes. Law enforcement officials have found it difficult to work in the quagmire of political corruption and drug trafficking that exists in Mombasa.

This makes the victory of the Akasha brothers' arrest all the more significant. Last year, in 2016, another well-known trafficker, Feisal Ali Mohamed, was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in jail for ivory trafficking.

This conviction happened despite massive levels of bribery and threats to the staff of Wildlife Direct, an ECF partner that was instrumental in bringing Mohamed to justice. Feisal's case was a significant breakthrough, but he was a minor player in a large and well-connected network. The Akashas were operating on a much higher level, making their prosecution a great success for everyone working to stop ivory trafficking. The ECF and our partners, including the Satao Project, used whatever influence we could to keep this case in the public eye, and at last the Kenyan government handed the Akashas over to the U.S. government for prosecution.

The charges against the brothers carry a mandatory minimum sentence of ten years in prison and a maximum life sentence. All of the suspects have agreed to cooperate with the U.S. authorities, which could result in a reduced sentence. While most of this information is likely to relate to drugs, the ECF's partners are working to ensure the suspects also offer information about their involvement in ivory trafficking and their partners in the business.



Photo credit: Department of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration

Left to right: notorious ivory traffickers Baktash Akasha Abdalla and Ibrahim Akasha Abdalla, along with two accomplices Vijaygiri Anandgiri Goswami and Gulam Hussein Shabakhash, arriving in New York in January 2017 to face charges of participating in a massive global drug and ivory trafficking enterprise.

# Investigating Illegal Ivory Trade in a Laotian Jungle Outpost



The entrance to Kings Romans casino.

Two of the world's leading experts on ivory and rhino horn trade recently infiltrated the seedy world of an opulent gambling mecca in the middle of the Laotian jungle, called Kings Romans [sic], and were stunned by what they found.

Acting on reports from their sources that illegal ivory trade markets were mushrooming all over Laos and other parts of Asia, the two ECF-funded consultants, Lucy Vigne and Esmond Bradley Martin, embarked on a one month investigation in the country. Their trip included a visit to the notorious Kings Romans.

Kings Romans is a 30-square-kilometer, tax-free, private concession in the mountainous jungles of north-western Laos. Boasting a luxury resort, spas, a golf course, a yacht club, and helicopter tours, it is a hotspot for gambling and prostitution. Most of its visitors come from across the nearby border with China. Here in Kings Romans Vigne and Martin discovered a seething market in illegal wildlife trade. They saw cages of live tigers and bears which would later be killed for their bones, skins, bile, flesh, and paws.

The stores were also selling small trinkets made from processed elephant ivory and rhino horn.

Most of the 1,014 illegal ivory pieces discovered by Vigne and Martin in Kings Romans were mass-produced small items such as bangles, pendants, and chopsticks but there were also larger pieces such as carved tusks.

*"Kings Romans is the perfect place for opportunist Chinese to sell illegal ivory trinkets to tourists," says Vigne. "The fact they displayed it openly made a mockery out of law enforcement in Laos."*

As the only westerners in Kings Romans, Vigne and Martin were being watched soon after they had arrived. Whenever possible, they engaged in conversation with the dealers but were unable to take photographs of the ivory items for fear of retribution.

*"We had to be very careful and felt very exposed, but the investigation gave us some crucial findings into illegal ivory trade and provided further proof that despite the China ban on legal ivory trade, other routes are opening up like cancerous growths throughout Asia," says Vigne.*



Worked ivory items for sale in Laos.

Vigne and Martin's Laos research, to be published in a full report in 2017, found that the trade in the country is now growing faster than anywhere else in the world. The research was part of a wider investigation into the growth of illegal ivory trade markets in Asia. In 2016, Vigne and Martin embarked on an ECF-funded in-depth investigation in Vietnam after hearing reports that the country was becoming a market in ivory, rather than just a trafficking route.

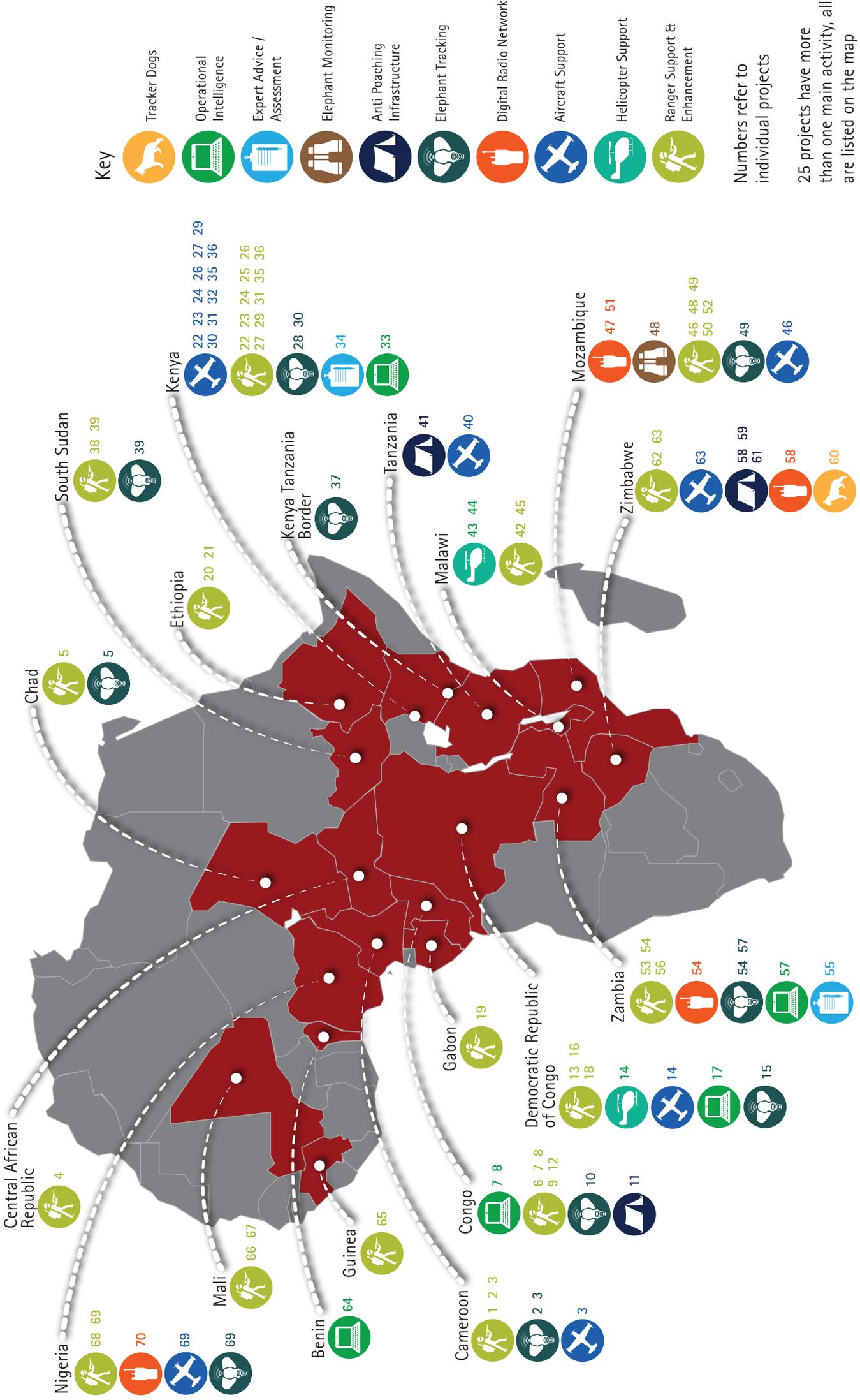
Their alarming findings showed that the Vietnamese ivory market now posed a significant threat to Africa's

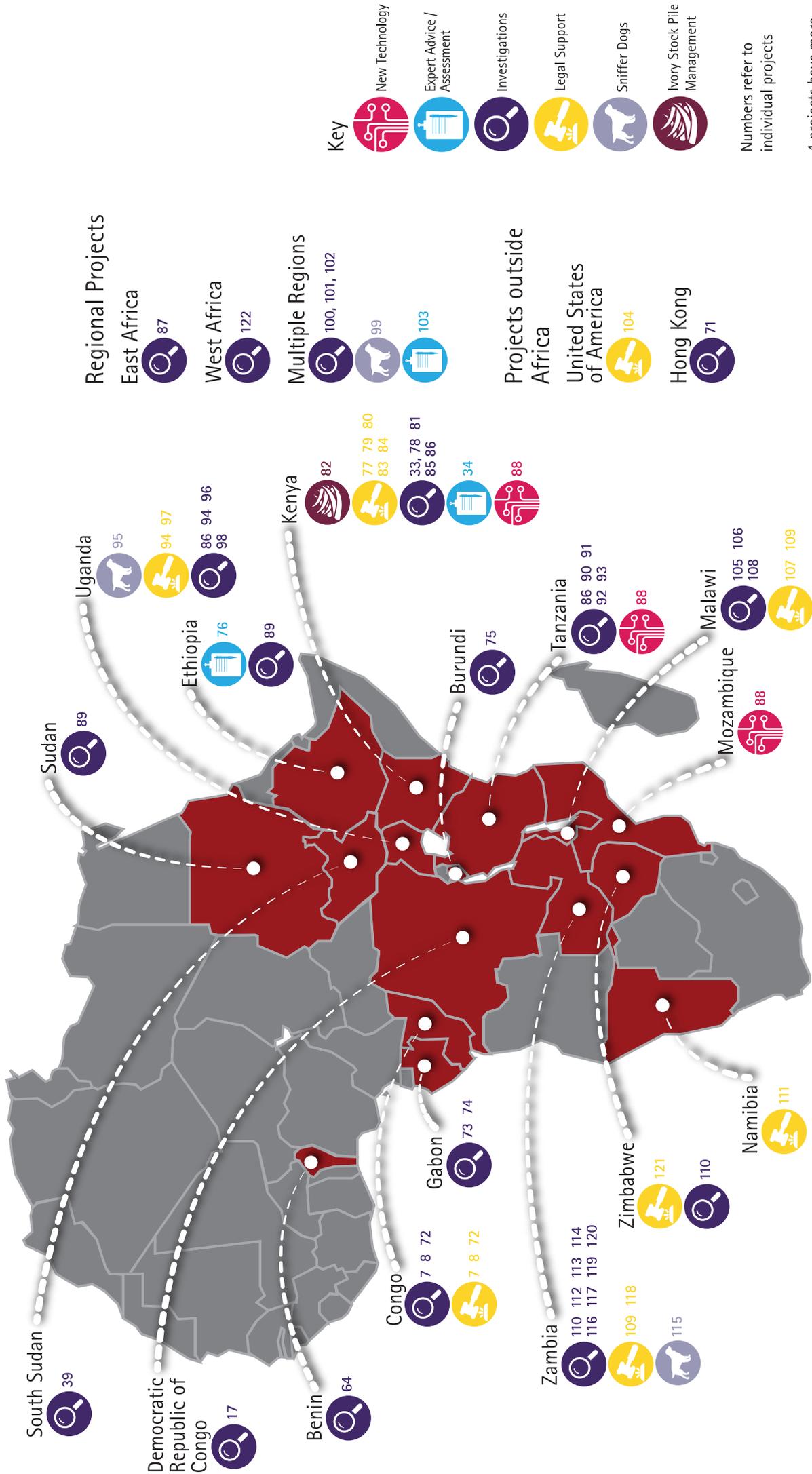


Photo credit: Lucy Vigne

elephants. When their report was released in July 2016, it received considerable attention at an international level. The following October, a Vietnamese delegation at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting acknowledged the existence of the ivory problem and asked for help to combat it. This sort of support and cooperation from the Vietnamese government is essential in the efforts to shut down the ivory markets in Vietnam.

# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND ANTI-POACHING PROJECTS





**Regional Projects**

East Africa 87

West Africa 122

Multiple Regions 100, 101, 102

99

103

**Projects outside Africa**

United States of America 104

Hong Kong 71

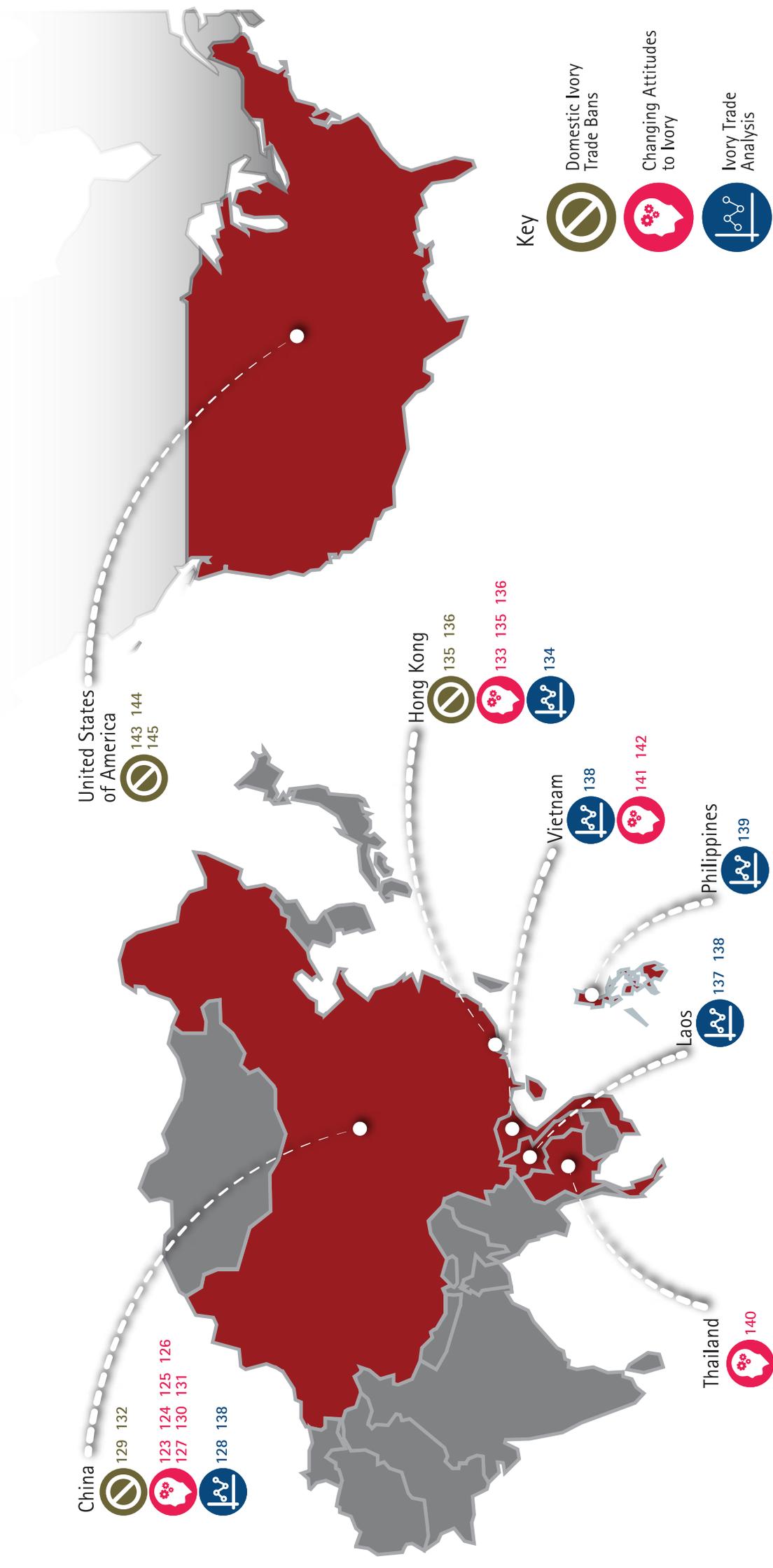
**Key**

- New Technology
- Expert Advice / Assessment
- Investigations
- Legal Support
- Sniffer Dogs
- Ivory Stock Pile Management

Numbers refer to individual projects

4 projects have more than one main activity, all are listed on the map

# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND DEMAND REDUCTION PROJECTS



Numbers refer to individual projects

2 projects have more than one main activity, all are listed on the map

As of Mid Year 2017

**\$10M** Deployed for Elephants in **4 YEARS**

ECF HAS INVESTED IN

**29** COUNTRIES

**145** PROJECTS

**49** ORGANIZATIONS



[WWW.ELEPHANTCRISISFUND.ORG](http://WWW.ELEPHANTCRISISFUND.ORG)

