



THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

African elephant populations more than halved from 1980 to 1990 © javarman/Shutterstock.com

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- > As the world's largest terrestrial mammal, (*Loxodonta africana*) has acted as a majestic icon of Africa for thousands of years. Besides their symbolic importance, elephants also play an important ecological role in shaping both savannah and forest ecosystems. Sadly, the future of the African Elephant is far from secure given the current poaching crisis.
- > Since 1979, African Elephants have lost over 50 per cent of their range and this, along with massive poaching for ivory and trophies over the decades, has seen the population drop significantly.
- > Throughout West Africa Elephant populations have declined as a consequence of hunting and habitat loss and are now found only in small and isolated habitat fragments. Major declines probably occurred well before the turn of the 20th Century and elephant populations have remained at low levels ever since. Many populations have become extremely threatened, with an estimated 90 per cent of their range now destroyed.
- > In 2012, over 300 elephants were killed by poachers in a single incident for the illegal ivory trade.
- > Overall, populations more than halved from 1980 to 1990, from 1.3 million to around 600,000.

Threats & Challenges

The small and already highly fragmented populations face serious threats, the main ones being habitat loss, human-elephant conflict and increasingly poaching. Human encroachment, competition with livestock, civil unrest and the construction of roads and railways are further increasing the pressure on remnant elephant populations. Very few large and stable populations remain, with two-thirds of them numbering less than 100 animals.

In 1989, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the international trade in ivory. However, there are still some thriving but unregulated domestic ivory markets in a number of countries, which fuel illegal international trade. Growing demand from affluent Asian countries is driving up the rate of poaching, to which in some countries, political unrest is also a contributing factor.



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What CMS is doing - the West African Elephants MOU

Both species of African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana* and *L. cyclotis*) are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), a conservation treaty concluded under the United Nations Environment Programme. As a result, the CMS West African Elephant Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drawn up to help conserve the last remaining elephants and their habitats in that region and all 13 Range States have signed. This MOU has been in force since it was first opened for signature in 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya.

It provides an international framework for Range States, NGOs, scientists, local people and the international community at large to collaborate in (a) evaluate the status of elephants; (b) maintain and increase elephant populations; and (c) improve elephant habitats in West Africa. The IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) is a Cooperating Organization to the MOU. The MOU evolved from the Strategy for Conservation of West African Elephants, developed by West African Range States, with support from the IUCN's African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG).

CMS CITES COOPERATION

Under the Joint Work Programme between CMS and CITES, the Convention Secretariats have committed themselves to map out current work on African elephants under the African Elephant Action Plan, African Elephant Fund and African Parties to CMS as well as the CITES - Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKES) programme. The Secretariats will also propose measures to promote and monitor synergies between CMS and the CITES MIKES programme on elephant conservation in Africa and support fundraising for African elephant conservation programmes.



African elephant © Melanie Virtue

About CMS

The Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), also known as the Bonn Convention, works for the conservation of a wide array of endangered migratory animals worldwide through negotiation and implementation of agreements and species action plans. It has 120 Member States.

CMS engages all relevant stakeholders in addressing wildlife crime in concert with all other aspects of wildlife conservation and management.

CMS Instruments

Animals receive protection under CMS through listing on its two Appendices, through global or regional agreements and through action plans.

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