



**A powerful symbol of nature, the world's largest land animal is still under threat**



African elephant, Kenya. © WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey

African elephants are the largest living land animals. Once numbering millions across the African continent, their populations had been decimated by the mid-1980s by systematic poaching. The status of the species now varies greatly across Africa. Some populations remain endangered due to poaching for meat and ivory, habitat loss, and conflict with humans, while others are secure and expanding.

**There are two sub-species of African elephant:**

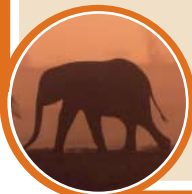
**1. The savannah elephant (*L. a. africana*),** also known as the bush elephant, is the largest elephant in the world, with a maximum shoulder height of 4m and weighing up to 7,500kg. It is recognizable by its large outward-curving tusks, and it lives throughout the grassy plains and woodlands of the continent, particularly in eastern and southern areas. Some populations in eastern and southern Africa are expanding.

**2. The forest elephant (*L. a. cyclotis*)** is smaller and darker than the savannah elephant, has straighter, downward-pointing tusks, and lives in central and western Africa's equatorial forests. Forest elephants are more generally threatened than the savannah sub-species due to poaching and loss of forest habitat.

Elephant numbers vary greatly over the 37 range states; some populations remain endangered, while others are now secure. For example, most countries in West Africa count their elephants in tens or hundreds, with animals scattered in small blocks of isolated forest; probably only three countries in this region have more than 1,000 animals. In contrast, elephant populations in southern Africa are large and expanding, with some 300,000 elephants now roaming across the sub-region.

**At a glance:**

Species:	African elephant ( <i>Loxodonta africana</i> )
Habitat:	Tropical and subtropical moist broadleaf forests, flooded grasslands and savannahs, Miombo woodlands, Acacia savannahs, and the Namib-Karoo-Kaokoveld desert
Location:	Sub-Saharan Africa
Population:	470,000–690,000
Status:	Vulnerable (IUCN–The World Conservation Union)



## What are the problems facing African elephants?

### Poaching and the ivory trade

The international demand for elephant tusk ivory was so great in the 20th century that the African elephant came close to extinction in parts of its range. A valuable commodity, ivory is used in carvings, jewellery, name seals, and other artefacts. As a result, between 1950 and 1985, ivory exports from Africa grew from 200 to 1,000 tonnes per annum, with most of the ivory taken from poached elephants.

In 1989, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned the international trade in ivory. Since then, only very limited, well-controlled ivory sales have been permitted from southern African countries with high elephant numbers. However, there are still some thriving but unregulated domestic ivory markets in a number of countries, some of which have few elephants of their own remaining. These domestic ivory markets fuel an illegal international trade, leading to continued poaching. A recent assessment of 22 ivory markets in Africa and Asia estimated that more than 12,000 elephants are needed each year to feed the demand of these markets.

In central Africa, elephants are also poached for their meat. Precise levels of this poaching are unclear, and many governments have inadequate resources to monitor or protect their elephants.

### Habitat loss and conflict with humans

Conflict between humans and elephants has resulted mostly from the loss of elephant habitat to human

agriculture and settlement. In the 20th century, elephant range in West Africa is thought to have shrunk by nearly 95 per cent. In central Africa, large tracts of elephant habitat are threatened by slash-and-burn agriculture and by large commercial logging operations, while throughout Africa less than 20 per cent of elephant range is protected in parks and reserves. Many herds are now confined to isolated protected areas. As a result, when elephants try to follow traditional migration corridors through what was once forest or savannah, they are confronted with roads, fields, and villages. This inevitably leads to conflict with local people.

Further conflict arises in instances when elephant populations grow and can no longer disperse naturally across their former range. This can lead to local overcrowding, as is the case in some parts of southern Africa where increasing elephant populations cause damage to their habitat.

Elephants have found farmers' crops attractive as an alternative food source. The cost for a farmer in this instance is high: as elephants can eat up to 300kg of food every day, even a small herd can destroy a farm during one night's foraging. Additionally, livestock and property is sometimes lost.

Human-elephant conflict can be fatal for both humans and elephants. Many wildlife authorities shoot animals that are harming humans and their property; local people also sometimes kill elephants in retaliation for attacks. In turn, elephants can also sometimes attack people when their paths cross. Current projects in Africa involving local communities are making headway in tackling human-elephant conflict, but still require more funding and research.



African elephant, Kenya.  
© WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey



Villagers use chili-soaked ropes to stop elephants from destroying their crops, Kenya. © WWF-Canon / Lyn Treloar



Left to right: Masai man; African elephant calves; Masai woman, Kenya. © WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey

## What is WWF doing to reduce threats to African elephants in the wild?

African elephants are ‘flagship’ species for their habitats — that is, charismatic representatives of the biodiversity within the complex ecosystems they inhabit. Because these large animals need a lot of space to survive, their conservation will help maintain biological diversity and ecological integrity over extensive areas and so help many other species.

In 2000, WWF launched a new African Elephant Programme. With 40 years of experience in elephant conservation, WWF’s current programme aims to:

- develop and apply policies and legislation that create an enabling environment for elephant conservation
- conserve elephant habitat effectively in order to increase range and connectivity between populations
- reduce the illegal killing of elephants
- reduce illegal trade in major elephant product markets in Africa and Asia
- reduce human-elephant conflict
- improve the livelihoods of people living alongside elephants through economic development activities linked to wildlife conservation
- increase public support for, and participation in, elephant conservation.

Given the breadth of elephant range, cross-border cooperation between governments is vital, and WWF seeks to encourage and foster this cooperation throughout Africa.

### Examples of WWF’s work to conserve African elephants include:

**1. In Tanzania,** WWF has been working for many years to conserve Selous Game Reserve, a protected area of some 45,000km<sup>2</sup>. Elephants in and around the reserve now number more than 70,000. WWF is helping nearby farmers keep elephants away from their crops through introducing chilli- and oil-soaked rope barriers around their fields. Elephants don’t like spicy foods, so the rope barriers have

been very successful in mitigating elephant crop raids. WWF is also helping local people benefit from community wildlife management schemes.

**2. In Mozambique,** WWF helped the government establish Quirimbas National Park to conserve 6,000km<sup>2</sup> of miombo woodland and its resident elephants. WWF is training park guards in elephant monitoring and anti-poaching techniques, and is working with communities to mitigate conflict with elephants.

**3. In many African states,** WWF is working with TRAFFIC — the international wildlife trade monitoring network organized and operated as a joint programme by and between WWF and IUCN–The World Conservation Union — to reduce the threat that illegal and illicit domestic ivory markets pose to many populations of African elephants. TRAFFIC also manages a global record of ivory seizures, called ETIS (Elephant Trade Information System) for CITES, that helps to identify trade routes and countries of particular importance in the illegal trade.

**4. Around the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya,** WWF is working with the Kenya Wildlife Service and the Durrell Institute for Conservation and Ecology to study human-elephant conflict, and to test methods for reducing crop-raiding (see *Focus Project box*).

**5. In Namibia,** WWF is helping to establish Community Based Natural Resource Management systems which build wildlife conservation into the rural economy, linking conservation with rural development through enterprises such as wildlife tourism.

**6. In Central Africa,** WWF and partners are working with the governments of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon, and the Republic of Congo to develop two transboundary protected areas, the Sangha Trinational and the Trinational of Dja, Odzala, Minkebe (TRIDOM). These cross-border complexes of forest protected areas cover more than 180,000km<sup>2</sup> and are home to some 55,000 forest elephants as well as other threatened species such as western lowland gorillas and chimpanzees.

**7. In Côte d’Ivoire,** WWF has been working with the Ministry

of Environment to rehabilitate Tai National Park, the single-largest undisturbed tropical rainforest in West Africa, and a haven for forest elephants, as well as chimpanzees.

**8. In South Africa,** WWF supported partner agencies in protecting an elephant migration corridor between Tembe Elephant Park and Maputo Special Reserve in Mozambique. The project fenced part of the so-called Futi corridor and provided water sources for local people to mitigate conflict and facilitate natural elephant movements.



"Watch tower" to see approaching elephants, Kenya. © WWF-Canon / Ste Drayton



Masai boy taking his herd back home, Kenya. © WWF-Canon / Martin Harvey

## Focus Project: The TransMara, Kenya

The grasslands and forests of the TransMara—a 2,900km<sup>2</sup> area of rolling hills in southwestern Kenya—border the Masai Mara National Reserve, world famous for its abundant wildlife including lions, zebras, hippos, giraffes, and African elephants.

Since 1979, the human population in the area has grown from 70,201 to 168,721. As a result of burgeoning human populations and limited space, the TransMara has become a conflict zone for elephants and local people.

WWF has been working with a team from the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent, since 2001 to measure, monitor, and reduce human conflict with elephants in this region. The team has enjoyed ground-breaking success in determining new methods to keep elephants away from crops.

In three sites, project staff monitor levels of conflict with elephants and test different methods to deter them. In a low-conflict area (Lolgorien), farmers rotate guard duty from purpose-built platforms in trees or watchtowers, using torches and tin drums to scare elephants away.

In a medium-conflict area (Laila), community guard duty is still undertaken, in conjunction with chilli- and/or oil-covered fences similar to the chilli ropes with which farmers have had such success in Mozambique. The guards in Laila also clear grass on either side of the chilli- and oil-fences so that fires may be set and filled with chilli, and cowbells are hung from the fence as an early-warning system in case elephants challenge the fence line.

In a high-conflict area (Emarti), strong barriers in gullies between forests and farms are being tried in addition to the deterrents at Lolgorien and Laila. Kenya Wildlife Service personnel are also involved at this site, in patrolling the area

perimeter by car. Elephants are chased away with thunder-flashes and other noises.

In addition to these trials, WWF and its partners are also training local people to record and report elephant activity, conflict with humans, and any intervention which alleviates the conflict—such as chilli ropes and early warning systems. As a result, changes in elephant behaviour can be mapped.

WWF and DICE are also working with villagers to develop land use plans that ensure fields are planted in blocks and that crops planted nearer the forest are not as attractive to elephants. At the same time, the project is aiming to convince farmers to continue and improve their cattle-farming rather than focusing on crops, to further reduce elephant interest in farms and human settlements.

This innovative project has led to a reduction in incidents of conflict, and in many instances farmers have been able to harvest their crops unhindered by elephants. Communities and conservationists are coming to a better understanding of how elephants respond to humans and to conflict resolution. As a result, there appears to be an increasing readiness for local people to address elephant problems more quickly and without violence.

The TransMara is a vitally important training ground for learning about human-elephant conflict, how to manage it, and how to promote harmony between humans and elephants in shared environments. The knowledge developed here will assist elephant populations and people throughout other elephant habitats.

The TransMara is part of the East African Acacia Savannas Ecoregion — one of WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions, biologically outstanding habitats where WWF concentrates its efforts.

### Find out more...

This fact sheet is designed to give a broad overview of some of the threats faced by African elephants, and to give examples of WWF and TRAFFIC's work and solutions on the ground. For more detailed information on species, WWF, TRAFFIC, and the work we do, please visit [www.panda.org/species](http://www.panda.org/species) and [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org)

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