

Survey of the ivory items for retail sale in Addis Ababa in 2008

Lucy Vigne, Esmond Martin

PO Box 15510 – 00503, Nairobi, Kenya; email: rhino@wananchi.com

Abstract

In a survey of ivory items for retail sale conducted in June 1999 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, almost 10,000 ivory objects were found, the fourth largest in Africa after Abidjan, Harare and Cairo. In 2004 TRAFFIC and the CITES Secretariat gave encouragement and technical help to the Government of Ethiopia to solve this problem; in 2005 the government cracked down on this illicit trade by confiscating illegal ivory items and arresting all of the shop owners found with illegal ivory. A survey conducted soon afterwards counted only 78 ivory items in the shops and stalls.

In early 2008, having been informed that numerous ivory items were once again for sale in Addis Ababa, we carried out a further survey. We found 2,152 ivory items for sale of which 1,790 had been crafted after 1990 (the year of the CITES ban). Although this is still a significant decline since 1999, the number of new items is still alarming. Tusks were being smuggled in from Kenya and Sudan for the six or so Addis Ababa ivory craftsmen, as well as tusks being used from Ethiopian elephants. The price for tusks had greatly increased from 1999 to 2008, but many ivory items, especially name seals and chopsticks, were cheap compared with the East Asian market, encouraging foreigners, especially Chinese, to buy them. We suggest that another initiative should be taken by the Ethiopian government with assistance from TRAFFIC to encourage officials yet again to enforce their laws against the illegal ivory trade.

Résumé

Lors d'une étude d'articles en ivoire pour la vente au détail menée en juin 1999 à Addis Ababa, en Ethiopie, on a trouvé presque 10.000 objets en ivoire, les quatrièmes plus nombreux en Afrique après Abidjan, Harare et Le Caire. En 2004, TRAFFIC et le Secrétariat de la CITES ont donné des encouragements et une aide technique au Gouvernement éthiopien pour résoudre ce problème; en 2005 le gouvernement a pris des mesures répressives contre ce commerce illicite en confisquant des articles en ivoire illégaux et en arrêtant tous les propriétaires de magasins dans lesquels on a trouvé de l'ivoire illégal. Une étude menée peu après a dénombré seulement 78 articles en ivoire dans les magasins et les kiosques.

Début 2008, ayant été informé que de nombreux articles en ivoire étaient encore une fois en vente à Addis Ababa, nous avons fait une étude supplémentaire. Nous avons trouvé 2.152 articles en ivoire en vente parmi lesquels 1.790 avaient été fabriqués après 1990 (l'année de la mise en vigueur de la CITES). Bien que cela soit toujours un déclin significatif par rapport à 1999, le nombre de nouveaux articles est toujours alarmant. Les défenses étaient passées en contrebande du Kenya et du Soudan à l'intention d'environ six artisans d'ivoire d'Addis Ababa, et même celles des éléphants éthiopiens étaient utilisées. Le prix pour les défenses avait largement augmenté de 1999 à 2008, mais beaucoup d'articles en ivoire, surtout les cachets de nom et les baguettes, étaient bon marché par rapport au marché est-asiatique, ce qui encourage les étrangers, particulièrement les Chinois, à les acheter. Nous suggérons qu'une autre initiative devrait être prise par le gouvernement éthiopien avec l'assistance de TRAFFIC pour encourager les fonctionnaires à mettre en vigueur leurs lois contre le commerce illégal en ivoire.

Introduction

The first detailed survey of the ivory markets of Addis Ababa took place in 1999. The survey found 9,996 ivory items for retail sale in 54 outlets (see Table 1) (Martin and Stiles 2000). Soon afterwards conservation organizations, governments and the international media put pressure on the Ethiopian government to implement their domestic and international ban on the ivory trade. This helped to reduce the trade. This commerce was not solely an Ethiopian problem; in 1999 poachers in neighbouring countries, especially Kenya and Sudan, were killing elephants for their tusks to supply the 10-20 ivory craftsmen in Addis Ababa at that time.

In 2004 TRAFFIC 'devised a strategy that would provide Ethiopia training and assistance with law enforcement and market monitoring' (Milledge and Abdi 2005). Accordingly, TRAFFIC carried out a survey in April 2004 and found 3,557 ivory items for retail sale in Addis Ababa. TRAFFIC and the CITES Secretariat then held a 'training event' with Ethiopian officials in mid-2004. In January 2005 the government responded. It sent 262 officers to raid 66 outlets in Addis Ababa who confiscated around 500 kg of ivory and other wildlife products. The government brought charges against all the outlet owners (Milledge and Abdi 2005).

In March 2005 TRAFFIC did a follow-up survey; only 78 ivory objects were seen openly for sale in only five outlets (45 small carvings and 33 pieces of jewellery). Some of the salesmen, however, had small quantities in paper bags under the counters or no doubt hidden away which could not be counted. Cooperation between TRAFFIC and Ethiopian officials had produced a dramatic result with a 98% reduction in the number of ivory items on display. This illustrates what the government can do when

Table 1. Number of retail outlets selling ivory and number of ivory items seen in Addis Ababa for various years from 1999 to 2008

Year	Number of retail outlets with ivory	Number of ivory items seen
1999	54	9,996
2004	51	3,557
2005	5	78
2008	44	2,152

Sources: Martin and Stiles 2000; Milledge and Abdi 2005

outside assistance from TRAFFIC and CITES along with quiet diplomacy and media pressure focus attention on a conservation issue.

Methodology

In 2007 visitors to Ethiopia told us that they had seen numerous ivory items on display in Addis Ababa, thus in January 2008 we carried out a survey to see how many ivory items were back on display. We surveyed the retail outlets counting each ivory article, identifying and photographing the items, ageing and pricing them, obtaining the nationality of the main buyers, and looking also at carvings made from other animal tusks, mainly from hippos and warthogs. We also asked shopkeepers about their businesses and learned about the wholesale prices of tusks, their origin, and the number of artisans working ivory. In Kenya, we interviewed informers on the trade in ivory from Kenya to Ethiopia.

Results

Ivory items seen for sale

We counted for retail sale 2,152 ivory items, of which 1,790 were new, 332 older (pre-CITES ban) and 30 of unknown age. These were located in 44 souvenir outlets, mostly small shops in the Churchill Road area and in two areas of the Mercato (the main city market). Whilst well under half of the souvenir outlets had ivory items on display, and most are small so they are not readily noticeable, the numbers, however, add up. Compared with



Lucy Vigne

Ivory trinkets, newly carved, for sale in the mercato.

Table 2. Older ivory items seen in Addis Ababa's retail outlets in early 2008

Item	Number	Percentage of total
Bangle	225	68
Figurine/figure	67	20
Carved tusk	17	5
Vase	6	2
Walking stick	4	1
Priest's baton	3	1
Bust	3	1
Candlestick	2	
Necklace	2	
Cup	1	
Paperknife	1	
Ring	1	
Total	332	

the last survey conducted in 2005 there has been a 28-fold increase in items seen and an 18-fold increase on items on display for sale in Addis Ababa. Of the 2,152 ivory items, 1,433 were on display, and we were able to find 706 more pieces (509 in new brown paper bags and 104 in one drawer). The items seen in bags and the drawer were all new. There were some other paper bags behind the counters that we saw, but could count the ivory items inside, and no doubt there was more ivory hidden away. Therefore, our figure is a minimum of what is actually available for sale in the shops.

Of the 332 pre-1990 ivory items, most common were bangles, figures and figurines as well as carved tusks (see Table 2). The bangles, usually plain but sometimes carved, are normally yellowish due to old age and show much wear and tear, having been worn on the upper and lower arm by Ethiopians in the south-west (Beckwith, Fisher 1999). They are sold as antique pieces, usually as single (USD 165), double, triple (USD 385) or quadruple bangle sets. They are much bigger and thicker than new bangles which therefore add to their greater expense. The figurines and figures were both of African animals and humans, carved on large tusks. Similarly, there were full tusks with human and animal carvings consisting of both bridges and upright figures on a velvet base. In general, large items such as these are no longer made as they are harder to hide.



Lucy Vigne

Old ivory bangles for sale near Churchill Road.

Table 3. New ivory items seen in Addis Ababa's retail outlets in early 2008

Item	Number	Percentage of total
Bangle	357	21
Ring	230	14
Earrings, pair	198	12
Necklace	184	11
Pendant	162	10
Chopsticks, pair	149	9
Cigarette holder	144	9
Name seal	70	4
Figurine	51	3
Comb	46	3
Hand cross	30	2
Bust	17	1
Mask	8	
Key	6	
Paperknife	4	
Pipe	3	
Vase	2	
Misc.	5	
Misc. not identified	124	7
Total	1,790	

Of the new items, the majority were crafted after 2000. The most common were jewellery, chopsticks, and cigarette holders (see Table 3). Those we saw in paper bags and those we could clearly see in a drawer were: bangles (23%), cigarette holders (20%), chopsticks (18%), rings (15%), pendants (9%), name seals (8%), and necklaces (6%). The

turnover would appear to be greatest for these mass produced items as we saw new supplies in some of the shops that were not yet displayed. Less common new items seen on the shelves were flat small 10-cm figurines of Ethiopian men and women, Ethiopian combs with long teeth, Ethiopian hand crosses, a few 10-cm small busts and 12-cm flat masks. There was only one newly carved tusk (35 cm) with an African face, and two tusk tips (20cm) of an African woman and man that were Central/West African in style.

The newly-made ivory objects are nearly all small and thus easy to smuggle out of Ethiopia and into the customer's home country. One shopkeeper advised us to wear the ivory we bought and not put it into hand luggage which can be searched and where x-rays could spot it. Another shopkeeper said we need not bother with paperwork for exporting, as it was easy to put ivory in one's suitcase where x-rays do not pick it up.

Other ivories for retail sale

Shopkeepers in Addis Ababa were usually honest in naming the animal from which their ivory items originated. One shop, however, said his new ivory items on display were all hippo ivory when in fact they were elephant ivory. Another said his necklaces had mixed elephant and hippo ivory beads. But normally one could recognize the type of ivory. Elephant ivory has small cross-hatch lines, and the objects often show

Table 4. Average retail prices in US dollars (official rate) of selected ivory items in Addis Ababa for various years from 1993 to 2008

Item	Size in cm	1993	1999	2004	2008
Bangle, new	1-2 wide	8	4	-	15
Ring	1	-	1	-	2
Earrings, pair	Medium	-	6	-	4
Necklace, bead	Medium	50	-	19	33
Chopsticks, pair	20-22	-	7	-	16
Cigarette holder	10	20	-	-	4
Name seal	5-10	-	8	8	18
Figurine	10	30	31	52	51
African comb	10	30	9	-	43
Bust	12	121	50	-	168

N.B. Most foreign visitors use the official exchange rate to cash their foreign currency into birr.

Sources: Vigne and Martin, 1993; Martin and Stiles 2000; Milledge and Abdi 2005



Lucy Vigne

New elephant ivory items are sometimes sold as hippo ivory.

the wider curvature of an elephant tusk. Small items, such as pendants carved as Ethiopian crosses, need to be made from softer elephant ivory for the intricate holes to be made. Hippo and warthog teeth are much smaller and more curled. These substances are also much harder and thus more difficult to carve without cracking. Hippo canines are sometimes carved roughly as figurines, with the more triangular cross section base often noticeable. We saw warthog teeth and also numerous hippo teeth figurine carvings, normally grouped together, on display. No doubt most of these come from poached animals, including from Ethiopia. Hippos, being on Appendix II, cannot have their tusks traded across international borders without documentation, but if elephant tusks can be smuggled in, so can hippo teeth for this retail market.

Prices for wholesale tusks and retail ivory items

These new ivory items for sale are of grave conservation concern. We have evidence from Kenyan and Ethiopian informers that new tusks from Kenya and Sudan continue to be smuggled into Ethiopia. For example, in Kenya elephants are being poached in the north around Mount Kenya, Marsabit, Mathews Range and Maralal. Traders in Isiolo and Nanyuki bought the tusks in late 2007 for about Ksh 2,000 (USD 31) per kg and send them by truck to Mandera and Moyale on the Ethiopian border. Elephants are also still being poached in Ethiopia (Blanc et al 2007). The price of raw ivory tusks in Addis Ababa vary according to size and quality. A small tusk of 2 kg in good condition can sell whole-



Warthog and hippo tusks are commonly carved into figurines.

sale for 1,000 birr (USD 110) per kg at the official exchange rate. A tusk of 5 kg in good condition can sell for 1,200 birr (USD 132) per kg at the official rate. Craftsmen buy these tusks and make the most sellable items out of them. We learned that there are nowadays about six craftsmen in and around Addis Ababa working from their homes.

Nearly all the ivory items for sale in Addis Ababa were carved in Ethiopia. The retail prices for selected old and new ivory items offered to us for sale (as prices are not on labels) are in Table 4. Shopkeepers do accept bargaining and were prepared to reduce prices by about a third. The prices are significantly less than those in eastern Asia. For example, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 2008 a pair of ivory chopsticks were five times more expensive, a ring was six times more and a cigarette holder was nine times as much (L. Vigne, survey carried out in May 2008, pers. comm.).

Table 5. Wholesale prices of raw ivory in Addis Ababa for 1993, 1999 and 2008

Year	Official rate for 5 kg tusk/kg	Unofficial (free market) rate for 5 kg tusk/kg
1993	61	43
1999	43	44
2008	132	125

N.B. Exchange rate: 1993 official 4.95 birr to USD 1 and unofficial 7 birr to USD 1; 1999 official 8 birr to USD 1 and unofficial 8.2 birr to USD 1; 2008 official 9.1 birr to USD 1 and unofficial 9.6 birr to USD 1.

The main buyers are foreigners: tourists, businessmen, diplomats, UN staff, conference attendees, and labourers (Chinese). In 2001 there were only an estimated 100 Chinese in Ethiopia, but by 2006 the figure had increased to 3,500 (Sautman and Hairong 2007). The Chinese are probably the major buyers

of ivory in Africa based on past surveys and ivory seizures (Milliken et al. 2007). This survey shows that the many Chinese working in Ethiopia (there are very few Chinese tourists) are major buyers today in Ethiopia. Nearly 15% of the new ivory items on offer for sale were chopsticks and name seals for the Oriental market, of which by far the most are Chinese. We also know that more Chinese still like very much to buy ivory jewellery and figurines compared with most other nationalities (Martin and Stiles 2003; Martin 2005).

Efforts to curb Chinese demand for ivory

We met the Chinese Defence Attaché who has been stationed in Addis Ababa for three years. He was aware of the ivory problem. He confirmed that most tusks used for carving in Addis Ababa are smuggled in from neighbouring countries, such as Kenya, because Ethiopia does not have enough elephants to support this illicit commerce. He informed us that the Chinese ambassador to Ethiopia instructs the managers of the Chinese companies to tell their workers not to buy ivory objects because this is illegal, and if they try to export them, they will be caught by Customs. The attaché said the Ethiopian government authorities check at the Addis Ababa airport for wildlife products and do occasionally arrest people. He explained that the Chinese do not need to buy ivory chopsticks in Ethiopia to bring home to China as wooden ones are available in China. Nor do the Chinese need to buy ivory name seals in Ethiopia, he further explained, as there are excellent quality hardwoods in China. He did say that it is still difficult to stop all Chinese buying ivory items in Ethiopia.

We also met the British Defence Attaché who spoke encouragingly that the police in Addis Ababa, if alerted to the ivory problem, would act upon it.



Lucy Vigne

In the mercato, only small new ivory items are seen nowadays.

Discussion

There has been a huge increase in the number of ivory items on display for sale in Addis Ababa in 2008 compared with 2005 (see Table 1). This is due to the fact that in 2005 there was a major clamp down by the authorities against ivory. Since then amounts have built up which suggests a lack of continued law enforcement in recent years.

From 1999 to 2004 prices of ivory items increased sharply. There has been an even bigger increase in price from 2004 to 2008 (see Table 4). The main reason is the increase in price of tusks in Addis Ababa; this has tripled in US dollars from 1999 to 2008 (see Table 5). Ivory items are cheap, however, compared to eastern Asia which encourages their sales. A pair of chopsticks sell for USD 11-22 dollars in Addis Ababa in 2008 compared with USD 139 in Guangzhou in 2004 (Martin 2006). This has increased demand and hence craftsmen are making items that are especially popular with Oriental buyers.

Conclusion

Ivory surveys conducted in 1993, 1999 and the 2004/5, as well as this latest 2008 survey, show the importance of regular investigative work to monitor and if necessary highlight irregular ivory markets. When these issues are disseminated by the press - along with the CITES process identifying the countries with the largest unregulated ivory markets which also draws attention to the problem - the Ethiopian government does help to stop the trade. Government action was the most effective in 2005 with the added support and guidance in law enforcement of the UK-based TRAFFIC network and the CITES Secretariat.

This 2008 survey shows that action to stop the increase in ivory for retail sale in Addis Ababa is urgently needed again. Although since 1999 the numbers of outlets and ivory items have continued to decline, the sudden dip in 2005 following short-term action, and then the rise again, illustrates clearly the short-term impact of this type of enforcement and highlights the need for more frequent checks and control measures. Three main strategies are required. First, more attention must be put on the large Chinese population now resident in Ethiopia to stop buying ivory items. The managers of the Chinese companies need to warn their staff more often against buying ivory due to the serious repercussions. Secondly, the Ethiopian government needs to conduct another clampdown on the ivory trade as was successfully done in 2005, again with the assistance of TRAFFIC and perhaps also the Chinese government. This is extremely urgent. Thirdly, and most important, these initiatives against elephant ivory and other endangered wildlife products need to be taken more frequently in the future. One-off crackdowns every few years are certainly not enough. Ethiopian law enforcement people must regularly monitor the shops to prevent any build up of illegal ivory.

The Ethiopian government has the capability of cracking down on ivory sales, with the active participation of the international community, including importing nations, neighbouring countries and international organizations such as TRAFFIC. This would greatly help to reduce elephant poaching in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries.

Acknowledgements

We thank Care for the Wild International for financially supporting our survey. We also thank Nigel Hunter, Simon Milledge and Dan Stiles for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

References

- Beckwith C, Fisher A. 1999. *African ceremonies*, 2. Harry Abrams, inc., New York City.
- Blanc J, Barnes R, Craig G, Dublin HT, Thouless C, Douglas-Hamilton I, Hart J. 2006. *African elephant status report 2007: An update from the African elephant database. Occasional paper series of the IUCN Species Survival Commission*, 33. IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group, IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.
- Martin E. 2005. Northern Sudan ivory market flourishes. *Pachyderm* 35:67-76.
- Martin E. 2006. Are we winning the case for ivory substitutes in China? *Pachyderm* 40:88-100.
- Martin E, Stiles D. 2000. *The ivory markets of Africa*. Save the Elephants, Nairobi and London.
- Martin E, Stiles D. 2003. *The ivory markets of East Asia*. Save the Elephants, Nairobi and London.
- Milledge S, Abdi M. 2005. A model for Africa: Ethiopia's efforts to close unregulated domestic ivory markets in Addis Ababa. *TRAFFIC Bulletin* 20(3):119-128.
- Milliken T, Burn R, Sangalakula L. 2007. *Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS) and the illicit trade in ivory: a report for the 14th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES*. CoP 14 Doc. 53.2, CITES, Geneva.
- Sautman B, Hairong Y. 2007. Friends and interests: China's distinctive links with Africa. *African Studies Review* 50(3):75-114.
- Vigne L, Martin E. 1993. Ethiopia's active trade in ivory. *Swara* 16(6):28-29.