



In early December 2015, the press release shown below documenting the decline in price of illegal raw ivory in China, was picked up by a wide range of media outlets. The Secretary General of CITES, John Scanlon, commented that the bottom had dropped out of the ivory market. A range of NGOs claimed credit for the demand reduction which supposedly had taken place.

At the time I informed the authors and Save the Elephant representatives that the sampling of legal and semi-legal outlets in northern China might not have been representative of that which was going on in a regional context. During various film shoots, over the past six years, we documented more and more ivory and ivory products becoming available in a wide range of neighbouring countries and gambling enclaves (specifically created to get around the national laws of China including those relating to gambling, prostitution, the illegal trade in wildlife and drugs).

Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne, the authors of the press release, confirmed that their survey had been limited to parts of China and some legal and illegal outlets for ivory. They agreed that their findings were most likely not representative of what has been happening in the wider region of South East Asia.

We made it a point to also film activities at various border crossing where we documented a total lack of control measures which would help restrict the cross border trade of contraband such as wildlife products - while countries in parts of Africa have graduated to introduce sniffer dogs there was no sign of any such control measures at the borders we checked out.

The trend of more and more Chinese travelling to neighbouring countries for pleasure as well as for shopping is evident everywhere as is the increasing number of Chinese owned shops in a range of retail markets and more and more hotels under construction in some of the border enclaves. There are now scheduled flights from places like Kunming in South West China to Chiang Rai in Thailand which pretty much exclusively serve the Kings Roman casino enclave at the Golden Triangle.

It has never been easier to watch and film Chinese customers checking out and buying ivory, rhino horn products, tiger bone jewellery and wine, bear bile and the like. We managed to film dozens, if not hundreds, of these sales transactions in stark contrast to Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne's press release stating that they had not seen a single person in a shop in China actively involved in buying ivory products.

Chinese customers would often take photographs on their mobile phones, send the images with the prices back to friends in China, receive feedback in minutes and then expand their purchases accordingly.

Although the price for raw rhino horn has dropped per kilo (but not for the corresponding jewellery which tends to be sold on a per gram basis), the rates quoted for ivory have been pretty consistent in the neighbouring countries at US\$ 800 to US\$ 1200 per kg with every dealer mentioning quality as a final determining factor. As to the thousands of worked items we filmed, negotiations were generally not just in terms of weight but based on the type and quality of the product on offer.

We have just concluded another three week film shoot documenting the demand for tiger products but since this trade is closely interlinked with ivory, pangolin scales, hornbill ivory, rhino horn and so on, we also asked our local investigators to check on changing prices and demand patterns. There was no talk of the bottom dropping out of any market, in fact the opposite, with more and more ivory on display in a range of trading centres in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

One could not avoid the impression that there might be a specific policy in place encouraging key Chinese ivory traders to set up shop in neighbouring countries - the first step in counteracting compensation claims which have been discussed in the context of China finally outlawing the domestic ivory trade. One shopkeeper in Laos told us that most of the ivory now on display in that country was carved in Laos by Chinese carvers.

When leaving China we flew out through Guangzhou International Airport. We again filmed a large supply of 'mammoth ivory' items in a souvenir shop located in the departure hall after customs and immigration. As with a range of other mammoth ivory outlets we looked into, the quantities and variety of items appeared to be on the increase. Clearly, the average consumer would be unable to determine, on the spot, if they are buying elephant or mammoth ivory. This new trend offers a perfect scenario for laundering African elephant ivory. A poster of a mammoth roaming the Russian tundra, combined with the story that mammoth ivory is legal and "presto" there would be a new component impacting supply.

In one location we found a range of shops with posters advertising elephant ivory but they had taped over the English version of 'ivory for sale' while still displaying the corresponding Chinese characters.

There is a very wide range of fake and falsified wildlife products on offer imitating rhino horn, ivory (some plastic and some bone), tiger wine, tiger teeth, tiger claws, tiger penis or bear bile (mostly from pigs) and all at a fraction of the price of the real thing. The Chinese traders and markets once again demonstrating how very good they are at beating the system and generally being miles ahead of any kind of enforcement bodies trying to protect the end consumer – or for that matter the wildlife.

We have been left with the overall impression of a culture of window-dressing, corruption and lip service - from the street dealers, to the manufacturers, to the wholesalers, to the policy makers with the corresponding infrastructure having been allowed to develop to serve this dark underbelly of China.

In the years we have monitored these markets little has changed despite some reporting of some aspects of this trade in some media outlets. After one such expose mid last year, the tiger wine vats were suddenly covered with red velvet in one of the locations. Six months later the tanks are again on open display with tiger skeletons floating in spirits above a bed of ginseng.

It is an ever changing scenario with one constant - overall demand seems on the increase and not in decline.

In another case, a news item by Al Jazeera TV, based on an investigative story by an NGO, resulted in some cosmetic measures with a concerned local expatriate being informed by the leadership of the enclave:

**'We have already solved the problem, we have to think in terms of Laos as a poor country. We cannot apply the logic of Western countries to solve this matter, because those developed countries only think about judging developing countries from their own standpoint. What Zhao Zhuxi (the boss) is doing here is good and is helping many people. So we shall continue following this track....**

**I gave up any intent of discussion with them, I don't think it would be of any use.**

Below, (left bottom corner), is a link to the display on a mobile phone, handed to us by a dealer, offering 33 different rhino horns of various weights and size. This type of marketing is used by wholesale importers sending the latest offers of new arrivals to a wide range of retailers. It would appear that a host of such networks exist.

How difficult would it be to get hold of some of these mobile phones and the data on them and analyse who the key players are and how the system operates?

On our last trip, we travelled with a former Russian government official who stated that Russia had helped establish the communist systems in many of these countries and under any communist system the authorities would have the enforcement capacity to counteract these trends if there was any kind of real political will.

Once again the conclusion at the end of the trip was: The demand is there, the market and the key dealers are very dynamic and are ready to adapt and take losses if necessary. Governance quality in the countries concerned is generally poor and encourages corrupt practices.

Based on these experiences, those peddling feel good demand reduction tales might well turn out to be part of the problem.

Karl Ammann  
March 2016

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Wild Aid campaigns push price of Ivory into the 'free-fall' zone  
Sam Smith, News 24  
December 9, 2015

See [link](#) for photo.

The value of Elephant Ivory has fallen hard in China, according to new data released on Monday by Save the Elephants.

Regardless of the rising prices of illegal ivory in the year 2010 to 2014, researchers Esmond Martin and Lucy Vigne reported the price of raw ivory over the past year and a half went from about R30 727 per kilogram to R16 095 per kilogram.

In a recent study by Save the Elephants for eight Chinese cities, researchers found consumer need for ivory is in a 'free-fall' zone.

The country's ivory carving factories are now suffering a shortage of the tusks and ID's, usually issued from the Chinese government to legally sell ivory, are being delayed reports Wild Aid.

Details on the most recent survey's findings will be published in January 2016, however, the new data correlates with a greater understanding of shifting mindsets and attitudes in China - showing that public knowledge of Africa's elephant poaching crisis has more than doubled between 2012 to 2014.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government has taken strides towards controlling the illegal ivory market, culminating in President Xi Jinping's September announcement for China and the

United States to work together to stop the ivory trade.

“The ivory price collapse in China is much-needed, good news for Africa’s elephants,” said WildAid CEO Peter Knights.

“Though there is much work to be done, this is an essential first step in ending the poaching crisis. The banning of the market in China and the United States puts pressure on Hong Kong, Thailand and Japan to follow suit and should encourage improved enforcement efforts in Africa, in places like Kenya and Tanzania.”

After the 2012 WildAid, Save the Elephants and African Wildlife Foundation partnered on continuous ivory public awareness strategies in China - the country put much-loved Chinese icons, such as former NBA star Yao Ming and actress Li Bingbing in the forefront of public messages.

Their faces were spread across banners, billboards and documentaries, demanding public never buy or accept ivory as gifts. Since then, China has made strides at improvement.

The country's big media houses, CCTV, and Xinhua sponsored over R61 billion in pro bono media placement and airtime to the campaign.

The importance of the message was further underlined in October with Prince William addressing the Chinese population "to turn the tide of extinction" by opposing the illegal wildlife trade.

Prince Harry's recent visit to South Africa sent out a global message for the preservation of the rhino, which is facing grave danger from illegal poachers too.

<http://traveller24.news24.com/News/wild-aid-campaigns-push-price-of-ivory-into-the-free-fall-zone-20151209>



[Rhino Horn pieces displayed on mobile](#)