

# ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND 2020 REPORT





# Overview

**2020 has been a strange year in every way, including for elephant conservation. Yet despite the uncertainty of the pandemic and its impact on wildlife in Africa, we've seen some unexpected and surprisingly positive outcomes for elephants.**

Africa appears to have been less directly affected by the pandemic than other parts of the world. There have been severe economic impacts, especially in the tourism industry, but civil disorder has thankfully been avoided, and people have generally shown a remarkable level of resilience. This means that most Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) partners have been able to continue their vital work of protecting elephants with only moderate disruption.

We have also fortunately not observed the widespread upsurge in elephant poaching resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic that was feared. Isolated incidents, such as one in which eight elephants were tragically killed in a single day in Mago National Park in Ethiopia, are worrying, but there has been nothing comparable to the large-scale poaching that was happening across Africa five years ago.

COVID-19 may have increased pressure on other wildlife through bushmeat hunting, but could have reduced ivory trafficking because of restrictions on local and international transport. Compared to 2019, when many tons of illegal ivory were seized, there has been very little recent evidence of large-scale ivory shipments.

© James Hammond.

Demand for ivory may also have been affected. When COVID-19 was linked to bats and pangolins in 2020, Chinese law enforcement officials became very active in clamping down on all illegal wildlife trade, increasing pressure on ivory traders. Potential consumers may have shied away from buying ivory because of concern about the increased penalties for being caught.

What the post-COVID future holds is uncertain. Will there be a surge of pent-up demand for ivory when Chinese tourists start travelling again and a spike in trafficking as smuggling routes reopen, or will the Chinese authorities successfully continue their clampdown on trade and sales?

## ELEPHANT POACHING REDUCED IN MUCH OF EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Elephant poaching across much of the savannah elephant range in east and southern Africa has been reduced. Six years ago there were 26 ECF sites across Africa where so many elephants were being killed by poachers that their continued survival was uncertain. Today, poaching in 15 of these sites has been reduced to a point that it does not pose a current threat.



Elephants in Namibia. © Chris Thouless.

However, elephants are far from being safe. Despite the best efforts of our partners, in 11 ECF sites poaching remains a major problem—and seven of these are in Central Africa.



Confiscated ivory, Nouabalé Ndoki National Park. © Zanne Labuschagne / WCS.

In places such as Nouabalé Ndoki National Park and its buffer zone in Congo, the carcasses of freshly poached elephants are sadly found by rangers almost monthly. Given the vast areas of almost impenetrable rainforest in Central Africa, it is likely that far more elephants are killed than are ever found, and so our ongoing anti-poaching support to this region remains vital.

## AS ELEPHANT POPULATIONS RECOVER, THEY OFTEN COME INTO CONFLICT WITH EXPANDING HUMAN POPULATIONS

The achievements in tackling the ivory trade that we report here are only possible thanks to our supporters. There is more work to do, however. Success has brought other challenges to the fore. As elephant populations recover and recolonize their former territories, they often come into conflict with expanding human populations. In response we have expanded the scope of the ECF to include projects promoting human-elephant coexistence as a fourth crisis pillar, to join our anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, and demand reduction strategies.

Innovation, understanding, and quick action are all key elements of the ECF network's accomplishments to date. These same attributes will be key in addressing the challenges of forging harmonious coexistence between humans and elephants. Together, the ECF's 88 partners and the thousands of individuals, foundations, and corporations around the world that make the work possible can create a sustainable future for elephants in Africa.



Human-elephant conflict in Africa is on the rise as people and elephants compete for space and resources. Converting this conflict crisis into coexistence is a significant new challenge for the ECF. © Naiya Raja.

## SUCCESSSES

**Elephant poaching reduced across eastern and southern Africa**

**Most partners have managed to maintain anti-poaching efforts despite impact of COVID-19**

**Significant custodial sentences for ivory poachers and traffickers in Republic of Congo, Malawi, and Vietnam**

## CHALLENGES

**Continued high levels of elephant poaching in Central Africa**

**Human-elephant conflict increasing across Africa**

**Political instability in several African range states limits conservation activities**

# THE ELEPHANT CRISIS FUND

Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network created the Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) to tackle the killing of elephants for ivory. The crisis is driven by the international ivory trade, which thrives on poverty, insecurity, organized crime, corruption, and greed. Although there are some signs of hope, the ivory trade continues and the ECF remains committed to ending it. As other threats to elephants' survival are coming to the fore, the ECF is expanding its scope to address these.

The ECF works with a coalition of individuals, scientists, conservation organizations, and governments to stop the killing of elephants, prevent ivory from reaching markets, reduce the profitability of the trade in ivory products, and to promote human-elephant coexistence.

**THE ECF HAS INVESTED IN 29 OF THE 37 AFRICAN ELEPHANT RANGE STATES**

The ECF supports the best initiatives in need of funds. The organizations able to make the most impact—whether they are tiny local NGOs or larger multinational institutions—get our support. A team of experts works to ensure strategic and effective allocation of the funds generously provided by donors.

The ECF is able to respond quickly and with minimal bureaucracy, deploying funds in as little as 24 hours when necessary. Uniquely, 100% of funds are used to support on-the-ground programs that save elephants—not a single cent goes to administrative fees or overhead.

In just over seven years, the ECF has deployed \$25 million to the best efforts to safeguard the future of elephants, and is aiming to disburse a total of \$50 million by 2023. The ECF is working to ensure that elephant populations across Africa are no longer under threat.

313

**Grants**  
issued by  
the ECF

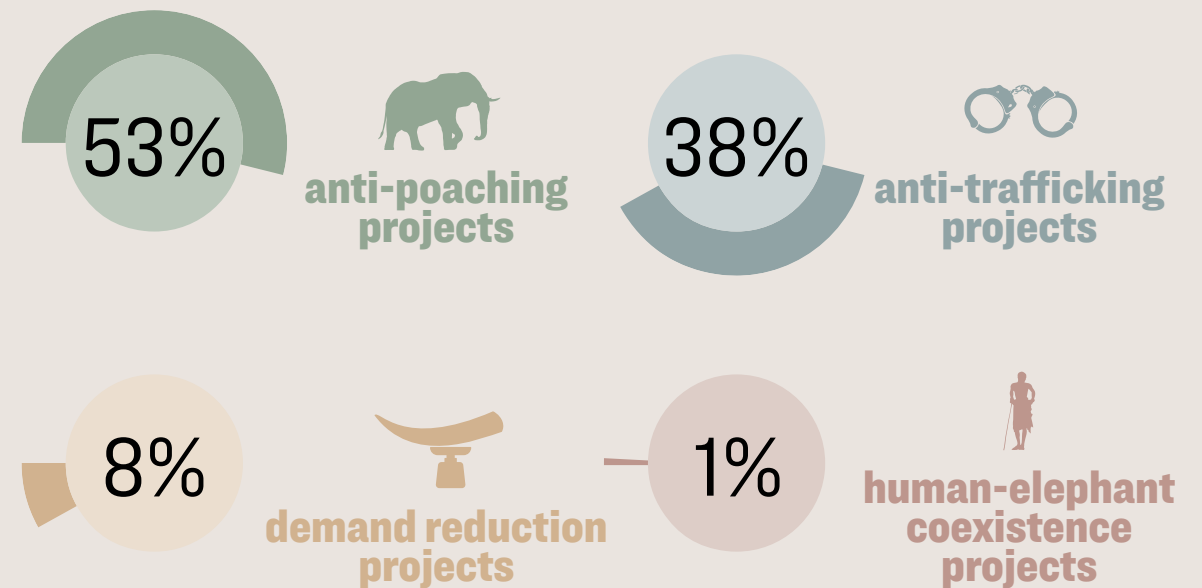
88

**Partners**  
have received grants  
from the ECF

40

**Countries**  
with ECF investments

## % of funding allocated to



**\$25 million**

granted to ECF partners  
since 2013

**\$2.1 million**

granted Jan to Oct 2020

**In 2020, the ECF has issued 30 grants to 25 partners in 22 countries**

# Anti-Poaching

Hope and resilience in tough conditions

© Scott Ramsay.

When COVID-19 first struck, there were concerns that wildlife law enforcement across Africa would be disrupted. Would our partners be able to continue their brave efforts at the frontline of elephant conservation in face of the pandemic?

In a word, yes. Dedicated rangers stayed on the job to protect wildlife as ECF partners pivoted to keep their anti-poaching activities on track, some with emergency support from the ECF. However, disruption to international travel and shipping has led to some delays in project implementation, mostly where foreign travel has been needed or when equipment such as radios and aircraft had to be imported.

## DEDICATED RANGERS STAYED ON THE JOB TO PROTECT WILDLIFE AS ECF PARTNERS PIVOTED TO KEEP THEIR ANTI-POACHING ACTIVITIES ON TRACK

Poaching for ivory continues to be a major and worrying threat in the last refuges of forest elephants in Central Africa. The ECF prioritizes this extremely challenging part of the world. It is difficult to protect elephants in forests because of the hostile conditions, compounded by limited transport, and communications. Widespread political insecurity creates further problems.

Every day rangers take great risks to protect these last remaining forest elephant strongholds. We are therefore deeply saddened to report that on September 17, 2020 two dedicated eco-guards lost their lives when their patrol post in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was attacked by armed militia. Warring militias in the area are eager to profit from illegal gold mining and ivory poaching within the reserve. When the DRC government gave the Wildlife Conservation Society the mandate to manage the reserve, the security of ranger teams was a top priority. The ECF funded the consolidation of several small, vulnerable security outposts into the single larger 'Adusa Post' to give the eco-guards more protection, and better living conditions. Without this outpost support, the loss of life would have been far greater, but the tragic deaths of Kausanwana Ukadunde and Kambale Changachanga – both long-serving eco-guards - is a stark reminder of just how challenging it is to protect forest elephant strongholds, and how the brave rangers who protect these precious places live under threat of constant danger.



Eco-guards Kausanwana Ukadunde and Kambale Changachanga, who were tragically killed in September 2020 when the Adusa Post (below) was attacked. © Okapi Wildlife Reserve (above), © Chris Thouless (below).



In other parts of Central Africa things are getting more difficult for poachers. The ECF has been supporting the Wildlife Conservation Society in its management of Nouabalé Ndoki National Park in the Republic of Congo for six years, since this is a key elephant stronghold, forming part of the TriNational Complex which extends into Cameroon and the Central African Republic.

Congo's most notorious poacher 'Guyvano' was responsible for killing several hundred elephants since 2008. In early 2018 eco-guards confronted his gang after they had killed eleven elephants. Guyvano escaped, but three of his associates were arrested, and this led to his arrest in May 2018. He escaped from jail just before he was to be tried in court, and carried on poaching, narrowly evading capture by eco-guards on several occasions. In May 2019 his men opened fire on a patrol, wounding an eco-guard and a soldier. The soldier's life was only saved thanks to the eco-guards' medical training. Guyvano again evaded capture but after he boasted widely of his success he was arrested again. Following a thwarted escape attempt, in August 2020 he was sentenced to 30 years of hard labor for attempted murder, trafficking ivory from poached elephants and possession of military weapons. This landmark case was the first ever wildlife trafficking conviction in the Criminal Court in the Republic of Congo.

In remote and war-torn parts of Central Africa, poverty and conflict often override concerns about the environment and conservation. However, success stories like those from Chinko in the Central African Republic (CAR) show that attitudes to wildlife are changing. There were believed to be as many as 50,000 elephants in and around Chinko in the 1970s but today, after years of civil war and rampant poaching, only 100 or so remain, closely protected by ECF partner African Parks. When four elephants turned up in a local village outside the reserve in July, village authorities turned to Chinko's rangers and the Government to come and protect the elephants from possible poachers, and to help usher them back to the protection of Chinko. One of the four elephants was a magnificent bull, one of the great survivors from the mass killing that had eliminated almost all of his kin. Now, with the protection provided by African Parks and the support of the local community, he has a chance of living out his natural lifespan.



African Parks rangers setting camera traps in Chinko in eastern Central African Republic. © Gael-Yann le Martin.

The greatest struggle for the survival of elephants is now taking place in Central Africa. Much has been lost there, but there is still a chance for some of these populations to recover, and the successes of ECF partners, against great odds, gives hope.

## THE GREATEST STRUGGLE FOR THE SURVIVAL OF ELEPHANTS IS NOW TAKING PLACE IN CENTRAL AFRICA



Important forest elephant sites in Central Africa: Dzanga Sangha Protected Area in Central African Republic (above) and Odzala Kokoua National Park in Republic of Congo (below). © Chris Thouless (above), © Frank af Petersens (below).



# Anti-Trafficking

Successes in a year of tumult

© Alex Hofford.

This year has brought considerable success in disrupting major trafficking networks and bringing notorious wildlife traffickers to justice. The syndicates are fast-moving and smart. Thankfully, so too is the coalition of ECF partners that oppose them.

**THIS YEAR HAS BROUGHT CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS IN DISRUPTING MAJOR TRAFFICKING NETWORKS AND BRINGING NOTORIOUS WILDLIFE TRAFFICKERS TO JUSTICE**

In July, one of the most prolific wildlife traffickers in Vietnam, Nguyen Van Nam, and two of his associates, received a total of 32 years in prison for trafficking ivory. The Wildlife Justice Commission had investigated this network for three years, with support from the ECF.



Nguyen Van Nam and associates photographed during covert investigations between 2016 and 2019. © Wildlife Justice Commission.

That same month, a network in Malawi which was responsible for trafficking ivory, rhino horn, pangolin, and many other species had its day in court. Nine Chinese nationals and six Malawians have now been sentenced to a total of 79 years in prison, following an impressive multi-agency investigation that was supported in part by the ECF. The leader of the network, Yunhua Lin, is still on trial and this is expected to conclude by the end of this year.



Chinese and Malawian members of a major wildlife trafficking network, sketched during court proceedings in Liwonde, Malawi. © Malawi Police Service.

Alongside supporting these efforts, the ECF has contributed to building the extraordinary levels of cooperation that now exist between NGOs and law enforcement agencies, as well as between different NGOs. However, there is more work to be done in order to dismantle trafficking networks and also to prevent new criminals from filling the void. It is also vital to tackle the underlying corruption that threatens to interfere with due process at every stage, and to prevent traffickers from bribing their way out of prison after all the painstaking efforts taken to gather evidence, arrest, and sentence them.

**IT IS ALSO VITAL TO TACKLE THE UNDERLYING CORRUPTION THAT THREATENS TO INTERFERE WITH DUE PROCESS AT EVERY STAGE**

The early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruption to illegal wildlife trafficking. A series of local and national lockdowns made it difficult for traffickers to move ivory across borders at each link in the trafficking network. Closure of airports and fear of quarantine meant that many traffickers were reluctant to travel. The disruption to global supply chains, combined with increased law enforcement at some borders, meant that ivory accumulated at various bottlenecks. With ivory in their possession for longer periods of time, some traffickers faced a greater risk of getting caught. Towards the end of the year ivory started to move again at a local level in some areas as supply routes began to open up. Our partners are monitoring the situation closely to see whether this is an indication of the trafficking networks reawakening.





# Demand Reduction

The state of Asia's ivory markets: COVID's varied impact

© Lucy Vigne.

The likelihood that wildlife consumption played a role in the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic has focused global attention on the trade in wild animals. In February, the Chinese government imposed new laws restricting the consumption of wildlife products and launched major law enforcement initiatives to shut down 'wet markets' and limit online trade. Although this was mostly focused on wildlife products consumed as food or medicine, law enforcement efforts against the illegal ivory trade have also intensified, and Chinese internet companies are increasingly under pressure from the government to remove illegal wildlife products.

## CHINESE INTERNET COMPANIES ARE INCREASINGLY UNDER PRESSURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT TO REMOVE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE PRODUCTS

© Lucy Vigne.



Unfortunately, deteriorating relations between the U.S. and China have made it increasingly difficult to get an accurate assessment of China's appetite for ivory. It has become difficult for foreign NGOs to work in China, or for local Chinese NGOs to work with foreigners.

Elsewhere in Southeast Asia, ivory markets have temporarily frozen since COVID-19 lockdowns were introduced in March 2020. Chinese consumers are no longer able to travel to neighboring countries and many Chinese retailers have returned to China during this period. This respite will in all likelihood be temporary: information from sources suggests that some wholesale ivory traders are preparing to shift as much ivory as possible as soon as borders with China reopen.

Prior to the pandemic, the region's ivory markets were shifting as law enforcement and legislation took hold. Surveys carried out in 2018 and 2019 found decreasing amounts of ivory for sale in physical and online markets. Monitoring the illegal trade has become more difficult as it moved underground, but with the arrival of COVID-19 in 2020, online ivory market activity increased.

## GREATER ENFORCEMENT HAS CHANGED THE WAY RETAILERS SELL IVORY BUT IT HAS NOT STOPPED THE TRADE ENTIRELY

In Laos, for example, ivory is no longer offered openly, but it continues to be sold through a network of underground retailers. The availability of ivory appears generally unchanged, temporarily disrupted by COVID-19, but likely to continue in a different form at the same level once tourism resumes. Greater enforcement has changed the way retailers sell ivory but it has not stopped the trade entirely. The remaining traders are fewer in number, which may provide an opportunity for targeted law enforcement action, while long-term demand reduction campaigns continue.



Ivory outlet in Vientiane, Laos, photographed in 2015. © Lucy Vigne.

# Human-Elephant Coexistence

A fourth pillar for the ECF

© Frank af Petersens.

The ECF has played a significant part in the reduction of poaching in Africa's savanna elephant populations. As those populations now recover, new challenges are emerging.

Africa is thriving, struggling, vibrant, beautiful, and changing fast. Industrial development, spreading agriculture, and rising human populations on the one side are meeting recovering elephant populations on the other. Where they meet, conflict between humans and elephants is the result.

Tackling this growing, widespread, and multi-disciplinary crisis is no easy task. The rural communities who live side by side with elephants are often among the poorest. How does one prioritize elephants and their needs when millions of people are struggling to survive? Social, economic, and health issues are powerful political competitors with long-term elephant conservation needs across the continent.

## HOW DOES ONE PRIORITIZE ELEPHANTS AND THEIR NEEDS WHEN MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE?

Although there is no silver bullet to turn this rising conflict into coexistence, our strategy will leverage the strengths of the ECF: collaboration between a wide network of small and large organizations working deep on the front lines of elephant conservation and support of their on-the-ground efforts to enhance coexistence. We will focus our limited resources on two fundamental areas of need for this new conflict crisis: land and corridor protection, and novel grassroots deterrent strategies to keep elephants and people safely apart where necessary.

Over the last few months of 2020, we have been developing our granting strategy and supported coexistence pilot projects in areas bordering the vulnerable Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, the slopes of the Ngorongoro Crater, and next to the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania.

In Mozambique, ECF partner Saving the Survivors is working with rural communities to deter elephants using simple 'HEC toolboxes'. Each toolbox contains high-powered flashlights, firecrackers, rope fence, reflective tape, and airhorns. With the right training these can be used safely and effectively to keep elephants away from crops and food stores, reducing the likelihood of injury or death to humans and elephants. Saving the Survivors are also trialing a novel organic 'smelly' elephant deterrent, and are monitoring collared elephants to create an early warning system to predict and prevent elephant incursions into community land.



One of three houses demolished by elephants in a remote part of Mozambique during a night of crop raiding, that left 20 acres destroyed. © Administração Nacional das Áreas de Conservação, Mozambique.

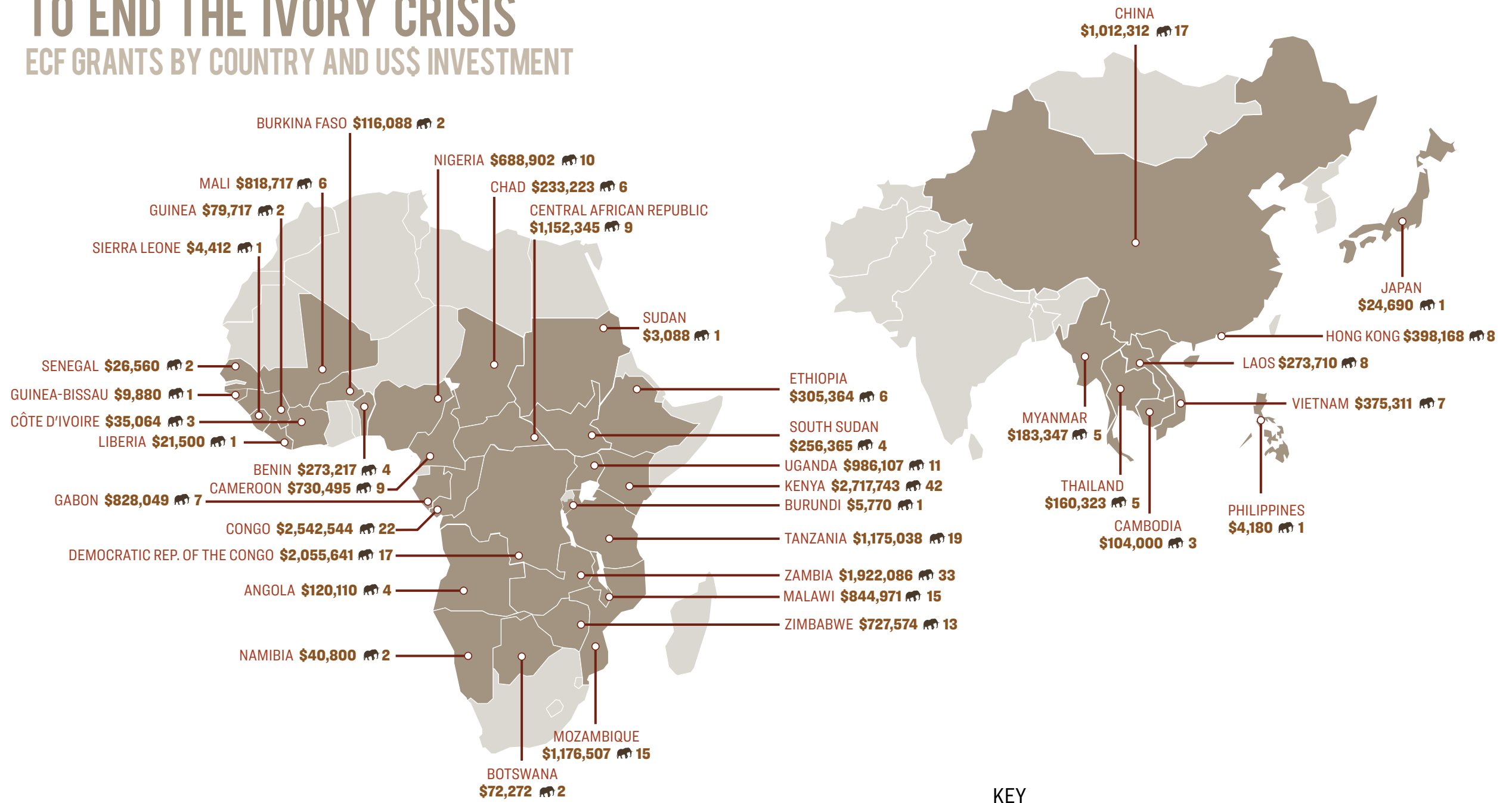


Village members, working with ECF partner Wild Survivors, scan the Upper Kitete Corridor in Tanzania. The ECF is funding scouts to conduct ecological monitoring and develop alternative sources of fuel, to reduce firewood consumption in this important elephant corridor. © Wild Survivors.

Elephants, communities, and partners need help, and thanks to the support of ECF donors, we are ready to take on the challenge of human-elephant coexistence projects across the 37 African elephant range states.

# GLOBAL INVESTMENTS TO END THE IVORY CRISIS

## ECF GRANTS BY COUNTRY AND US\$ INVESTMENT



\* The ECF has also funded 21 anti-trafficking grants that span regional or multi-regional areas, with support totaling \$2,431,357. In addition, the ECF has funded three demand reduction grants and one anti-trafficking grant in the USA totaling \$91,649.

### KEY

- \$** Amount granted (US\$)
- 🐘** Number of grants

This map includes all grants issued since the launch of the ECF in 2013.

# Our Partners

Seven years of granting have allowed us to develop an extensive network of remarkable partners, all working with the united aim of creating a sustainable future for elephants. Our partner network is the core and strength of the ECF, allowing us to link organizations and individuals to share knowledge and experience, and catalyzing positive change. This year we have been excited to welcome many new partners, including those working to ensure human-elephant coexistence, into the ECF family.

ADM Capital Foundation  
 African Parks  
 African Wildlife Foundation  
 Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux, Gabon  
 Basel Institute on Governance  
 Big Life Foundation  
 Biocarbon Partners  
 Born Free Foundation  
 Centre on Illicit Networks & Transnational  
 Organised Crime  
 Chengeta Wildlife  
 Connected Conservation  
 Conservation Justice  
 Conservation Lake Tanganyika  
 Conservation Lower Zambezi  
 Conservation South Luangwa  
 EAGLE Network  
 East African Wildlife Society  
 Ecoexist Trust  
 Elephant Research and Conservation  
 Elephant Voices  
 Elephants Alive  
 Environmental Investigation Agency  
 Fauna & Flora International  
 Focus Africa  
 Focused Conservation  
 Forgotten Parks Foundation  
 Frankfurt Zoological Society  
 Freeland  
 Game Rangers International  
 Global Wildlife Conservation  
 Gorongosa Restoration Project  
 Integrated Rural Development and Nature  
 Conservation  
 International Fund for Animal Welfare  
 International Zoo Veterinary Group  
 Kenya Wildlife Service  
 Kissama Foundation  
 Legal Assistance Centre, Namibia  
 Liberty Shared  
 Lilongwe Wildlife Trust  
 Lukuru Wildlife Research Foundation

Maisha Consulting  
 Mara Elephant Project  
 Maravi Risk Management  
 Mareja Community Conservation Project  
 Natural Resource Conservation Network  
 Natural Resources Defense Council  
 Northern Rangelands Trust  
 Oxford Brookes University  
 PAMS Foundation  
 Panthera France  
 Research Centre in Biodiversity and Genetic  
 Resources  
 Save the Elephants  
 Saving the Survivors  
 Southern Tanzania Elephant Project  
 Space for Giants  
 Stichting Wings for Conservation  
 Stop Ivory  
 Tashinga Initiative Trust  
 The WILD Foundation  
 The Zambezi Society  
 Tikki Hywood Foundation  
 TRAFFIC  
 Tsavo Trust  
 Uganda Conservation Foundation  
 University of Utah IsoForensics  
 University of Washington  
 Wild Planet Trust  
 Wild Survivors  
 WildAid  
 Wildlife Action Group Malawi  
 Wildlife Conservation Global  
 Wildlife Conservation Society  
 Wildlife Crime Prevention  
 Wildlife Justice Commission  
 Wildlife Traxx Consultancy  
 Wildlife Works  
 WildlifeDirect  
 Working Dogs for Conservation  
 World Wildlife Fund  
 Zoological Society of London

## Thank you

The turbulence of 2020 has created economic uncertainty for many of our partners. That we have been able to continue providing essential funding during this uncertain time is only possible due to your incredible generosity. We are grateful for your unwavering commitment to the vision we all share, a future where elephants are no longer under threat. We hope the progress outlined in this report gives you reassurance that your support is making a difference to the future of elephants across Africa. We are thankful to our generous major supporters, #knotonmyplanet and Tiffany & Co, and to our many private contributors.



  
SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

  
ELEPHANT  
CRISIS FUND

 WCN  
Wildlife Conservation Network

[elephantcrisisfund.org](http://elephantcrisisfund.org)