



Elephants and ivory trade

Elephants could be described as the flagship species of CITES. The story of elephants shows how CITES can conserve a species through regulating its trade, while at the same time helping local communities.

Threats to elephants

Elephants have suffered declines as a result of

- poaching for their tusks to supply the international ivory trade
- the loss of habitat by the expansion of human populations.

Elephants and CITES

Asian elephants occur in isolated populations in South and South-East Asia. The Asian elephant is classified as “Endangered” and is listed in Appendix I of CITES. This means that any commercial trade is prohibited.

African elephants have a very large range across the African continent. Initially, the African elephant was listed in CITES Appendix II in 1977, allowing regulated trade. However, in the 1980’s, African elephant populations declined by more than half almost entirely as a result of poaching. In 1989, African elephants were elevated to the higher CITES listing - Appendix I, thereby stopping commercial trade.

As a result, African elephant populations increased in parts of the continent. Their status now varies considerably across Africa. Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa have been allowed to transfer their populations back to Appendix II to allow some regulated trade.