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## YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

**Questions** were submitted to IWMC on 11 March 2024 by a young 6<sup>th</sup> grader student, and **Responses** to the questionnaire were given by our IWMC Young Advisor/Expert - Youth Involvement section, Christopher Palos. Christopher is a Professional Hunter and Game Ranch Management Alumni from South Africa.

1. How has ivory trading impacted the elephant population? Has it gotten better or worse?

Uncontrolled ivory trade had a negative impact of elephant populations. In 1989, international ivory trade has banned, but the demand for ivory has not gone away, and poaching does occur in some parts of Africa. However, regulated, legal, ivory trade can have positive effects for both elephants and the relevant governments/people concerned. The money generated from legal trade could support conservation efforts and elephant management.

2. Why are elephant ivory tusks important for elephants?

Elephants use their tusks for various tasks, such as debarking trees to eat the bark, and for fighting. You can often see if an elephant is "left-handed" or right-handed" by which tusk had been worn down and is shorter. However, tuskless elephants, do occur naturally in some populations, and these elephants go their whole lives without knowing the difference. Elephants have a wide diet and can feed on grass and softer vegetation where tusks are not a necessity. In most cases, the gene that causes tusklessness only occurs in female elephants who do not fight for mating rights as male elephant can do from time to time.

3. What tends to occur to the ivory that is removed from elephants? What kinds of things are created?

Ivory can be used to make several artefacts and ornaments such as piano keys, pool balls, chess pieces, knife handles etc. more importantly, it has use in traditional medicines, and it can have a cultural significance for many people who hold onto ancient values.

4. What happens to elephants whose ivory tusks are removed? Can they live without tusks?

Think of tusks as your teeth. It is not practical to remove elephant tusks while trying to keep them alive as this would literally be a huge and very complicated dental surgery where the animal would likely not survive. In nature, elephants often break their tusks from fighting or using it over a lifetime, and they can indeed live without them.

5. What kind of laws have been passed to stop poaching and ivory trading? Have those laws been effective?

As mentioned earlier, in 1989 the international trade in ivory was banned at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Many countries have banned elephant hunting such as Kenya. However, I do not see any of this as being effective because it deprives African people from utilising a renewable natural resource. There are many poor and impoverished people who live in Africa and often these people share a space with wildlife including elephants. If poor people are offered money to poach a dangerous animal that eats their crops and kills their community members from time to time, then they will continue to poach. That is why poaching is low in areas where people can benefit from the wildlife that they are forced to live with, such as trophy hunting areas. In such areas, a small number of animals are legally hunted each year and the people can get meat, employment, and many other benefits that would not normally be available. It is important to note that Africa is BIG and not all areas are suited to luxurious photographic tourism that exclude hunting- in addition, animal populations still need to be managed which is why hunting is important.

## 6. How can people get involved to help protect elephants from poachers?

The best way to protect wildlife from poaching is to allow the maximum benefit to people from wildlife. If the poor people in Africa are given ownership of wildlife and are allowed to trade and benefit from it, they will consider it as important as their crops and livestock. In South Africa, you can own and trade in most wildlife species. This means that a land owner can buy, sell, hunt, capture, or farm with wildlife. As a result, we now have more game than cattle in South Africa and traditional agricultural land is being converted to game farms and nature reserves because people can make money from wildlife.

## 7. Are there any fun facts or stories you could share about elephants?

The most important fact about elephants that I can tell you is that they are not as “endangered” as the world thinks. As I mentioned earlier, Africa is a big continent with many different countries, habitats, and elephant populations. In some countries like Kenya and Senegal, they may be endangered, however, in most Southern African countries like Botswana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, there are far too many elephants. In these countries, the elephant overpopulation is damaging the habitat and causing other species (both animals and plants) to become endangered. Some of these species most people don't even know about such as the ground hornbill, martial eagle, bushbuck, knobthorn tree, and many more. We joke around and call the Kruger National Park, the Kruger Elephant Park because sometimes it is the only animal seen when visiting.

I hope this helps, please feel free to ask any further questions. If you are interested, I can recommend some books that may provide some more insight into the topic of wildlife management and conservation in Africa.

1. 'The South African Conservation Success Story' by David Mabunda, Peter H. Flack, and Shane Mahoney (also available as a documentary)
2. 'ELEPHANT 'CONSERVATION'; The Facts & the Fiction' by Ron Thomson
3. 'Mpunzi, Dawn of a New Era' by Ian Flemming Simpson