

Poachers Were Responsible for the Deaths of 100,000 African Elephants in Only Three Years



Earlier this summer, the world mourned the death of one of Africa's largest tuskers, the great Satao. A poacher killed Satao using a poisoned arrow and hacked out his tusks, which were more than six and a half feet long. The loss of Satao was particularly heartbreaking because of his status as one of the last remaining great tuskers in Africa. However, Satao's death at the hand of poachers was just one example of the devastating wave of poaching currently occurring in Africa. According to new research, **poachers killed more than 100,000 African elephants between 2010 and 2012**. Preliminary data from following years shows that the slaughter is ongoing.

A new study led by [Save the Elephants](#) Scientific Board Chairman George Wittemyer of Colorado State University provides one of the first reliable Africa-wide estimates of the number of elephants poached each year. Save the Elephants, founded by Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton, is one of WCN's fourteen Conservation Partners. Quantifying the illegal killing of elephants is a difficult but necessary undertaking that is essential to inform conservation. Save the Elephants' long-term monitoring of elephants in Samburu, Kenya provides the highest visibility and most accurate record of the impacts of poaching on elephants. This study is the linchpin for introducing global leaders and celebrities to the atrocities of poaching, and also serves as the key site from which scientific interpretation of levels of illegal killing in Africa were derived. You can support this research and monitoring by [donating to Save the Elephants](#).

The study also found that Africa's wild elephant population dropped by 2-3% each year between 2010 and 2012, even when new births that replaced some of the losses from poaching are taken into account. These levels are **unsustainable for the long-term survival of the African elephant species**. Elephants are spread across many different areas of Africa, and the

populations of 75% of these areas are declining. Many individual populations are decreasing by far more than the 2-3% figure. The poaching surge has left elephant populations with few prime-aged males for breeding, devastated family and social structures and created elephant orphans who struggle to survive on their own.

Researchers determined that illegal killing in Samburu, the location of Save the Elephants' monitoring program, began to surge in 2009. More than 20% of the known elephants in the area were killed between 2009 and 2012. The surge was directly correlated with a huge leap in local black-market ivory prices and a significant increase in the number of illegal ivory seizures - increasingly destined for China - in Kenya's ports. Central Africa had the highest level of illegal killings on the continent, contributing to a 63.7% decline in its entire elephant population between 2002 and 2012.

The elephant poaching crisis is now so widespread and complex that it requires a coalition of leaders, NGOs, institutions, scientists, media and governments to solve. The Elephant Crisis Fund led by Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network helps to build and support this coalition by providing crucial funding to on-the-ground projects that address poaching, ivory trafficking, and demand for ivory.