

Cruel trade in ivory to be illegal from today as world leading ban takes effect

- UK's Ivory Act comes into force to ensure protection for world's elephants
- The near total ban on elephant ivory sales is one of the toughest of its kind
- Key manifesto commitment as part of a wider UK drive on international conservation

A near total ban on the import, export and dealing of items containing elephant ivory comes into force today (6th June), putting the UK at the forefront of global conservation efforts.

Elephants are commonly targeted for their ivory tusks and the demand for ivory is known to contribute to poaching, driving a decline in elephant populations. The ban will ensure vital protection for the world's elephants by putting a stop to the UK trade in ivory.

The ban covers ivory items of all ages, not only those produced after a certain date, allowing only a narrowly defined set of exemptions. As a result, it will now be illegal to deal in ivory items unless they have been registered or have an exemption certificate.

The number of elephants free in the wild has declined by almost a third, with the savanna elephant population plummeting by around 30 percent – equal to 144,000 elephants – across 15 African countries between 2007 and 2014. It's estimated around 20,000 are also still being slaughtered annually because of the global demand for ivory.

The UK's world-leading Ivory Act is one of the toughest bans on elephant ivory sales in the world, with some of the strongest enforcement measures. Those found guilty of breaching the ban will face tough new penalties including an unlimited fine or up to five years in jail.

Animal Welfare Minister Lord Goldsmith said:

The world-leading Ivory Act coming into force represents a landmark moment in securing the survival of elephants across the globe for future generations.

Thousands of elephants are unnecessarily and cruelly targeted for their ivory every year for financial gain. As one of the toughest bans of its kind, we are sending a clear message the commercial trade of elephant ivory is totally unacceptable.

The UK has long led the way in conservation and our ban shows

continued global leadership in doing all we can to protect the world's most endangered species

Dr Mark Jones, Head of Policy at Born Free:

Born Free has long campaigned for an end to all trade in ivory, so we are pleased to finally welcome the UK's Ivory Act. Its implementation must now be sufficiently robust to ensure only items that genuinely meet the exemption criteria can be traded in future, and that any transgressions are dealt with promptly and severely

International Fund for Animal Welfare UK director James Sawyer said:

Today is a good day for elephants. With as many as 20,000 elephants a year poached for ivory, this ban could not have come a moment too soon. IFAW believes ivory should only be valued on a live elephant and the overwhelming public support for banning the trade shows the majority of people feel the same.

Legal ivory markets have long provided a smokescreen for illegal trade, putting endangered elephants in further jeopardy. Ivory trading in the UK has now rightly been consigned to the history books and everyone who has played a part in this important conservation victory should be proud.

The ban coming into force will now close domestic ivory markets, representing a step forward in leading global efforts to protect the elephants after delays due unsuccessful legal challenges.

The UK Government is pushing for a global species abundance target to be agreed at this year's Conference on Biological Diversity and has contributed £3.98 million through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund to projects around the world that protect elephants from poaching and illegal trade to benefit wildlife, local communities, the economy and protect global security.

The Government launched the digital ivory service earlier this year allowing those who own ivory to register or apply for an exemption certificate. People will only need to register or certify items for the purposes of dealing in exempt items containing ivory. Those who own but are not planning to sell their ivory items do not need to register or certify them.

The Government is also considering extending the Ivory Act to other ivory-bearing species and will publish the response to the consultation later this year.