

[News story: Forensics network develops better detection methods](#)

A seized tusk is examined. Photo credit: Traffic

A government-funded project which is helping to bring an end to the illegal wildlife trade has secured an injection of cash to help African countries crack down on illicit traders and poachers.

The African Wildlife Forensics Network started in 2015 with support from Defra's [Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund](#), and delivers improved evidence gathering and analysis to support prosecutions and clamp down on the illegal wildlife trade.

Led by the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\)](#) with [TRACE Wildlife Forensics Network \(TRACE\)](#) and [TRAFFIC](#), the initial Defra-funded project has secured a legacy for wildlife officials in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe as they will receive specialist training for carrying out wildlife forensic investigations thanks to the support of [£400,000 over two years from players of the People's Postcode Lottery](#).

Eight African countries have taken part in this project and it is delivering wildlife forensic capacity through training and equipment and developing national and regional level plans for further development and coordination of wildlife forensic services.

Jorge Rios, Chief of UNODC's Global Programme for Combating Wildlife and Forest Crime said:

We are working with countries to improve the knowledge and skills of actors from the crime scene to the court room to respond to wildlife crime. Forensic evidence is key to strengthening the investigation and prosecution of wildlife crime.

UNODC is grateful to the UK for its continued funding to fight international wildlife crime.

Another of the highlights from across Africa involving the African Wildlife Forensics Network has been the significant progress seen in Zambia. Recent changes to the national Wildlife Act have markedly increased penalties for wildlife crime, resulting in fewer guilty pleas and a greater requirement for robust evidence to support prosecutions.

Following completion of the Zambia wildlife forensics needs assessment, and the subsequent participation of the [Zambian Department of National Parks and](#)

[Wildlife \(DNPW\)](#) at the AWFN workshop in Gaborone, Botswana, in May 2016, the Project Team worked with DNPW to plan how forensic science could best support national wildlife law enforcement.

In Botswana, specific training was provided to the Botswana Police Service's Forensic Science Service (BPS-FSS) in the area of DNA species identification. UK scientists worked with the [Botswana Department Wildlife and National Parks](#) who hosted one of the regional project workshops.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

We must protect wildlife around the world from habitat loss, poaching and illegal trade. Killing elephants for their tusks is shameful and inhumane and we will bring an end to this abhorrent practice.

That's why we've outlined plans to ban ivory sales, and we are investing £26m to tackle illegal wildlife trade and driving global action on conserving endangered species.

Rob Ogden, co-Director of TRACE said:

All too often, the criminals poaching Africa's wildlife are walking free because it is proving impossible to bring them to book successfully,

But now, thanks to the fantastic support from players of [People's Postcode Lottery](#), wildlife officers in the region will have the means to gather the evidence that will help put these criminals where they belong—behind bars.

Environment Minister, Thérèse Coffey this week visited Kenya (3 – 4 April) to discuss efforts to tackle the illegal trade in wildlife and to see projects directly making an impact in the conviction and jailing of criminals involved in these crimes.

Kenya is the fourth biggest recipient of Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund money with more than £1.9 million committed through eight IWT Challenge Fund projects that involve Kenya.

The Minister visited the [Kenya Wildlife Service](#) where she saw fingerprinting technology developed in the UK to trace ivory poachers.

This technology has already been used to arrest 15 poachers in Kenya.