

Press release: UK fingerprinting kits to help in fight against illegal wildlife trade

Foreign Office Minister Mark Field visited the London office of the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) today for the official handover of 100 forensic fingerprinting kits to fight the illegal wildlife trade.

The kits, specially designed to lift fingerprints from ivory, have been donated by IFAW and will be distributed to countries attending the upcoming London Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in October.

The new fingerprinting technique, developed by the Metropolitan Police and King's College London, can reveal prints up to 28 days after poachers have touched the ivory, compared to the two or three days with current conventional powders. This will significantly increase the chances of identifying the criminals behind the illegal ivory trade.

The innovative technology will be used by law enforcement agencies around the world to test illegally traded wildlife products for fingerprints and bring criminals to justice. The Foreign Office has been working with IFAW to build links with priority countries and to share training and expertise with local law enforcement officers and rangers.

Foreign Office Minister Mark Field said:

These new fingerprinting kits are a fantastic example of British innovation and technology being used by law enforcement agencies around the world to put criminals involved in the illegal wildlife trade behind bars. The Foreign Office and IFAW have partnered up to distribute kits and boost training for rangers and police in countries in Africa and Asia already, and we hope these additional kits will be put to good use by those countries who will pledge to take action at our upcoming conference.

The illegal wildlife trade is devastating endangered species populations around the world, from the African elephant to the Asian pangolin. This is a serious organised crime, depriving local communities of sustainable livelihoods and lining the pockets of corrupt middlemen and criminal gangs. We must act now if we are to stop it in its tracks and save endangered species before it is too late.

These kits are already making a real difference in the fight against the illegal wildlife trade. When the original trial kit was put into use in

Kenya, it helped to secure evidence in four cases, which ultimately resulted in 15 arrests, including five police officers, and the seizure of 11 elephant tusks and 50 pieces of worked ivory.

Philip Mansbridge, UK Director at IFAW, said:

These pioneering ivory fingerprinting kits will aid wildlife crime investigators on the frontline in Africa and Asia, providing them with an additional tool in their vital work to catch elephant poachers, thus helping to safeguard elephants and other threatened wildlife from poaching for future generations.

This ground-breaking new method of fingerprinting ivory uses a small-scale magnetic powder, meaning it is now possible to detect fingerprints on an elephant's tusk for up to a month after it has been handled, as opposed to just 24-48 hours using traditional techniques.

Working with Kings College and the Metropolitan Police, IFAW has so far deployed around 100 ivory fingerprinting kits in 23 countries to help gather evidence to stop elephant poachers. This is just one part of IFAW's global efforts to protect elephants and the places they call home. We are grateful to the Rt. Hon Mark Field MP and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for helping us showcase and distribute these kits to attendees of the upcoming London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade in October.

Notes to editors

- The ivory fingerprinting kit was researched and developed by the Metropolitan Police Forensic Imaging Team and Fingerprinting Department and also with Dr Leon Barron from the Forensic Department at King's College London, so is a London based partnership between the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), the Metropolitan Police and King's College London.
- The success of the new kit relies on the reduction in size of the powder used, which requires less sweat residue for the powder to adhere to and enhances the marks, giving better definition. It is also inert and allows DNA samples to be taken from the fingerprints and could become a vital tool in stopping the illegal wildlife trade. Further tests have shown it also works on hippo ivory, polished rhino horn, lion and tiger teeth and claws and even pangolin scales.
- The illegal wildlife trade is a serious organised crime with revenues worth up to £17bn a year, more than the combined income of the Central African Republic, Liberia and Burundi.
- Around 20,000 African elephants are killed by poachers each year. Savanna elephant numbers have declined by a third from 2007 to 2014 and

over 1,000 rhinos were poached in South Africa last year alone. Wildlife in many parts of Africa is at crisis levels.

- The UK will be hosting a conference on 11-12 October this year, bringing together leaders from both supply and demand countries so we can work together to stamp out the illegal wildlife trade for good. The conference will agree action to tackle IWT across three broad themes:
 - Tackling IWT as a serious organised crime, including increasing collaboration across continents to tackle IWT-associated illicit financial flows and corruption;
 - Building coalitions, particularly through increased engagement with the private sector, NGOs and academia, and;
 - Closing markets, by sharing successful approaches for reducing the demand for illegal wildlife products, including ivory.

Further information