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It is a periodic collection of items of interest to our members. Opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of the Society. Information and advertisement is offered in good faith but the Society does not warrant the status or reliability of the information contained.

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Front cover illustration

The Liben (or Sidamo) Lark.

Endemic to Ethiopia, this unassuming lark is one of Africa's most threatened birds. Discovered as recently as 1968, it is estimated that fewer than 150 birds survive on an overgrazed plain near Negele Borana in the Southern Lowland area.

The lark is apparently relatively easy to find for a bird that is so close to extinction. The males can be heard for distances of several hundred metres when they make their short vertical songflights in the early morning.

The Negele Borana area is also one of the few sites where one of the most sought-after birds in Africa can be found – the rare and endemic Prince Ruspoli's Turaco (illustrated on page 6).

Photo © Nik Borrow



Efforts to curtail Ethiopia's illicit retail ivory trade

Lucy Vigne and Esmond Martin

Wildlife experts believe there may have been over 2,000 elephants in Ethiopia in 1990, but latest figures, not updated unfortunately since 2006, state 634 'definitely known' and another 920 'possibles'. Elephants are still being illegally killed in Ethiopia. Ivory sales also continue, although all domestic trade in ivory as well as all imports and exports of old and new ivory, raw and worked ivory, have been prohibited since the CITES ban in 1990. In 2009 we were asked by TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network headquartered in Cambridge, UK, to carry out a survey of ivory items on retail sale in Addis Ababa to provide information for the government. We counted 1,340 ivory items in 37 souvenir shops in the capital. We learned that tusks are still being smuggled into Ethiopia, mainly from Kenya and Sudan. A 2-kg tusk was going for the equivalent of USD 81/kg, down from USD 110/kg the previous year due to the devaluation of the birr. We also learned that nine craftsmen provide ivory items for two shops regularly, and there are other carvers who produce items when they receive raw ivory, who are based in and around the capital.

In 1999 we surveyed the Addis Ababa shops and stalls and counted 9,996 ivory objects (the fourth largest number counted in a survey of African cities at the time, following Abidjan, Harare and Cairo). We provided our information to the press which helped cut down this illicit trade. In 2004 TRAFFIC counted 3,557 items and carried out a training programme with government officials to help law enforcement. The following year, 262 officers raided 66 retail outlets and confiscated about 500 kg of ivory items and other illegal wildlife products for sale and fined the shop owners. A TRAFFIC survey the following year found only 78 items for sale. There were no further official checks or raids, but concern started to grow that increasing numbers of ivory items were appearing for sale once again, hence our TRAFFIC study in 2009.

Compared with a survey we carried out in Addis Ababa in January 2008, some of the outlets, especially the smaller ones, had stopped selling ivory and traditional curios, opting to sell new tourist trinkets. Nevertheless, ivory items were still on display for sale in some souvenir shops albeit not so many, that are mostly along Churchill Road, Colson Street, around Tewodros Square, the Saint Teklehamanot area, and Nigeria Street near the post office. While the famous market, the Mercato, used to sell many old ivory items, there are fewer retail outlets selling ivory nowadays and generally only small trinkets. These shops are in two locations: the old souvenir area and the new section of the Mercato near the bus depot. Some of the hotels had souvenir outlets selling ivory amongst other curios, and we even found some new ivory beaded necklaces on display in two outlets at the Bole International Airport! Of the items we saw 1,068 were openly on display (394 older pieces and 674 recently-carved items made after the 1990 ban) and 272 items were tucked away in bags (42 old bangles and 230 brand new items). The hidden old bangles were in two



outlets in bags, but the vendors removed them from us claiming they were already sold. The hidden brand new items were also in bags, but were shown to us in a back room as the vendor hoped we were wholesale buyers. He was unusually trusting, leaving us there to examine (and count) the items and to photograph them! Vendors were much more nervous than before, sometimes suspecting we were not buyers but investigators!

Of the recently-carved items, most common were jewellery (rings, pendants, necklaces, bangles and earrings) followed by figurines, name seals (used in East Asia to stamp one's signature on a document), cigarette holders and chopsticks – in that order. Most of these are in demand by the Chinese, many of whom work in Ethiopia or elsewhere in Africa and travel in transit through Ethiopia, picking up souvenirs in the new tourist hotels on their way home at a fraction of the price they would pay in China. There were also the more traditional Ethiopian figurines, combs, hand crosses, busts and masks for sale. Again the main buyers are foreigners. Ethiopians rarely buy ivory for themselves. Some of the larger antique shops that sell old Ethiopian artefacts and crafts still have displays of ivory, mostly heavy, thick bangles from the tribes of southern Ethiopia and Sudan, along with figures and carved tusks. The vendors, however, were again edgy and worried if we produced a camera or asked too many questions. It was mainly in the newer shops selling ivory, such as those in some of the recently built hotels where transit passengers stay, that the inexperienced vendors talked openly and freely about sales, perhaps not knowing that ivory was illegal or about the 2005 raid.

Prices varied according to the quality and condition of an item and depending on the outlet, as well as on the desperation of the vendors to sell. With the world recession reducing customer numbers, compounded by the rainy season and power cuts, some vendors were prepared to drop their prices by 20% or more. Recently-carved ivory items were relatively cheap. A bangle was selling for about USD 41, a beaded necklace for about USD 16, a pair of chopsticks for USD 35 and a name seal for USD 30. Human figurines were more expensive at around USD 150. It was the large proportion of items being made for the Chinese that was alarming, and some vendors said to us they could order more pieces if requested. The number of Chinese residents has risen in Ethiopia from 100 in 2001 to 3,500 in 2006.

Although there has been a considerable decline in ivory items for sale in Addis Ababa in the last decade, with most vendors not wanting to deal in ivory due to the risks involved, we saw a significant amount of new ivory items for sale. We had talks with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority before our departure in order to discuss our findings. Then, on 25 November 2009, the authorities once again took action and raided 81 outlets, seizing 191 kg of ivory items and other wildlife products, arresting the shop owners who were taken to court and fined from ETB 5,000–ETB 9,000 (USD 393–708). The police and judiciary worked together with the wildlife authority efficiently dealing with the problem, removing ivory from the shops. Since this time, we have received no feedback regarding ivory sales nor whether items are creeping back onto the shelves. Funds for follow up surveys are generally slow to materialize, but it is hoped this second raid in Addis Ababa will hinder the shop owners from selling more ivory items, and this in turn will



reduce demand for tusks from Ethiopia's dwindling elephant population and reduce demand for ivory from neighbouring countries.

Ethiopia must be congratulated on its effort to reduce the retail ivory trade. Regular checks will be needed in future to prevent the lucrative sales of ivory re-occurring, and messages are needed, both within Addis Ababa for the general public, and at the airports and hotels to alert everyone about ivory. It seems many customers are unaware that selling and buying ivory plus taking it in and out of the country are illegal and can incur severe penalties.

Not only is the domestic trade in retail ivory in Ethiopia an ongoing concern, there is a growing threat regarding large consignments of illegal raw ivory being smuggled out of Africa to eastern Asia. In September 2010, more than 90 kg of cut raw ivory on an Ethiopian Airways flight from Addis Ababa was found by Thai customs at Bangkok's international airport. Smugglers had packed it in four large pieces of luggage. Every effort must be made at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa to prevent the smuggling of ivory, both worked and raw. It is an airport that has now become an entrepôt for trade to Asia from all over Africa, Officials there have to become more vigilant, employing more techniques, perhaps including sniffer dogs, to intercept ivory in order to close down this trade route.

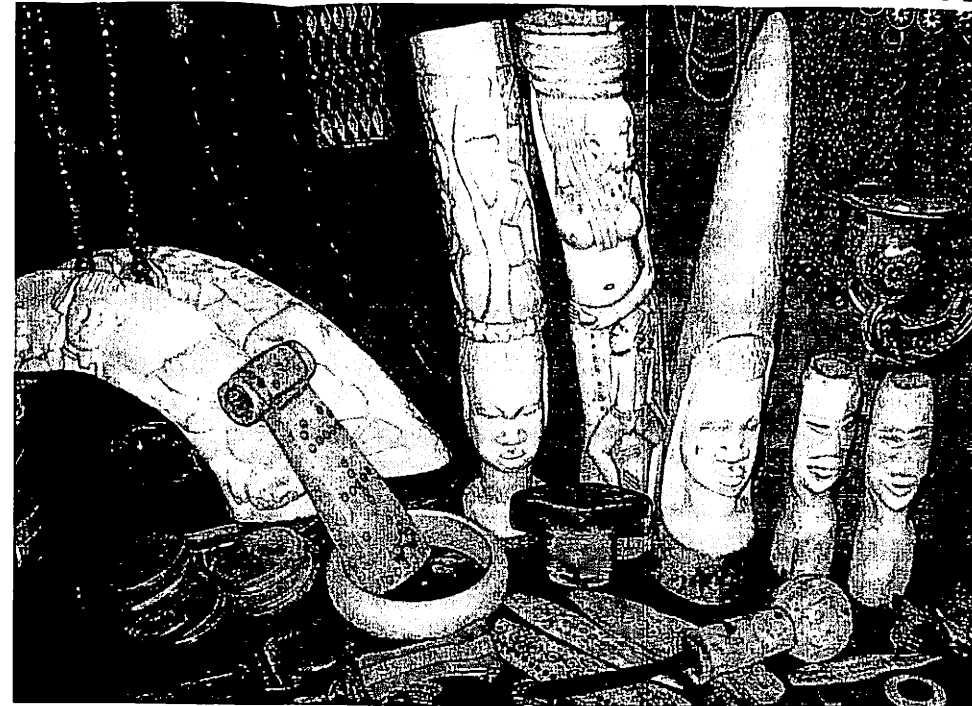
Editor's Note. I recommend that if readers want to know more on this subject they should read Vigne and Martin's full paper 'The status of the retail ivory trade in Addis Ababa in 2009' published in the March-April 2010 issue of TRAFFIC Bulletin. This can be downloaded from the TRAFFIC website: <http://www.traffic.org/bulletin>

The Cave Children of Ethiopia

Joyce Dunn

Ababa is about seven years old. Since the age of five she has lived in a cave near the summit of Ethiopia's highest mountain Ras Daschen. At 4200m the air is thin and normally the cave is shrouded in cloud. Her parents live in a village about ten miles away and bring her food three times a month. She doesn't see her family very often.

About eighty children aged between five and eleven live in this way. Their job is to tend the goats and to keep them from the wolves and hyenas that prowl day and night. Land is now so overgrazed in Ethiopia that only the upper slopes can provide perennial grass during the drier months of February to June. The cloud that hangs around the mountains ensures a minimal amount of vegetation. So while the parents are busy ploughing the lower slopes before the rainy season, the children must look after the sheep and goats where the cloud meets the mountain. This may be normal work for children all over Africa. The difference here is that these mountain children rarely see their parents and they must sleep high up in the cold caves at night.



Sales are slow for larger ivory carvings such as human figurines as foreign visitors do not like to risk smuggling out bulky objects. Photo © Lucy Vigne



Left: Assefa playing his flute



Right: Ababa dressed in the sheepskin to keep her warm

Photos © Joyce Dunn