

CELEBRITY ADS BOOST RHINO HORN TRADE AWARENESS

In China and Vietnam, actors, pop stars and other celebrities use their influence to help kill the demand for rhino horn and ivory products

Since 2012 AWF has been working with partner WildAid to create global awareness of the wildlife trade crisis, focusing primarily on elephants and rhinos in an effort to stem demand for ivory and rhino horn in the key markets of China and Vietnam. Celebrities including actor Jackie Chan, Virgin founder Sir Richard Branson, and Tanzanian pop star Alikiba starred in a series of public service videos and advertisements, reaching millions of people, awakening them to the horror behind wildlife products.

A SURGING DEMAND IN VIETNAM

Because its horn is falsely believed to be a magical cure-all for ailments ranging from cancer to hangovers, the rhino has seen its populations decimated by poaching – and,

unfortunately, a recent surge in demand has seen the number of slaughtered rhinos increase dramatically. In 2007, just 13 rhinos were killed in South Africa, and in 2014 this number rose to 1,215.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, the wildlife trade monitoring network TRAFFIC, and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups have identified Vietnam as “the principal end-use market” for rhino horn. In 2014, in response to the rising crisis, AWF and WildAid teamed up with the Vietnamese environmental organization CHANGE to bring the conservation message to the Vietnamese people.



THE PROOF IS IN THE NUMBERS

In 2014 and 2016 the campaign partners and the Nielsen Corporation surveyed residents of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi to gain insights into people’s awareness of the rhino horn trade and attitudes about it.

The 2014 survey revealed that a majority of Vietnamese residents believed rhino horn had medicinal benefits. In 2016, after the awareness campaigns, 67 percent fewer people believed rhino horn has medicinal value. Just under 10 percent of respondents believed that rhino horn could cure cancer, down from over a third in 2014.

The 2016 survey also showed a 68 percent increase in the understanding that rhino horn is composed of keratin, the same substance found in hair and fingernails.

Although public awareness is growing, there is still work to be done. More people need to be dissuaded of rhino horn’s medicinal value, and rhino horn is still coveted as a status symbol by wealthy collectors in countries including China and Vietnam.

AN ANTIQUES COLLECTOR TO THE RESCUE

To address collectors, who are a driver of rhino horn demand, we recently launched a campaign with the prestigious antiques expert, TV host and director of Beijing Guanfu Museum, Ma Weidu.

“It is going to take a long time to change centuries of deep held beliefs and entrenched Chinese culture,” said Mr. Ma. But he is working to do just that by dedicating an episode of his popular program to the threats facing rhinos and by appearing in a television public service announcement in collaboration with AWF and WildAid.

GIVING RHINOS A VOICE

In the fall of 2017, AWF and WildAid released a moving PSA starring a talking rhino, to drive home the horrors of poaching from a rhino’s perspective. Popular celebrities including Li Huan (judge of “The Voice of China”) and Phan Anh (a Vietnamese actor, model and emcee) lent their voices to the rhino and helped spread this heartbreaking story across global markets.

—Gayane Margaryan

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政府禁止象牙買賣 Government Ban Ivory Trade




TOP: Li Bingbing speaks at the "Say No Campaign" press conference in Hong Kong in 2015.

ABOVE: Rhino horn sold on the black market for use in traditional Chinese medicine.

RIGHT: WildAid press conference in Hong Kong. From left to right: Alex Hofford, WildAid; Dr. Elizabeth Quat, Hong Kong legislator; Chan Young, NPC member and Karie Pang, University of Hong Kong/Public Opinion Programme.

AWF participates in ivory crushes to help broadcast the message that ivory trafficking won't be tolerated.





Objects destroyed in August ivory crush represent more than 100 elephants poached

On August 3, the destruction of 2 tons of ivory worth \$8.5 million sent a clear message: Ivory belongs nowhere but on an elephant

On August 3, 2017, the state of New York destroyed nearly 2 tons of illegal ivory confiscated through coordinated law enforcement efforts. In a somber ceremony in Central Park, AWF, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and other leading wildlife conservation groups, with the support of Tiffany & Co., destroyed ivory worth \$8.5 million, an amount that represents more than 100 elephants killed for ivory.

Nearly 100 elephants are killed every day in Africa due to poaching, a trend that, if continued, would see elephants become extinct within decades. AWF participates in ivory crushes to help send a clear message that the illegal trafficking of ivory will not be tolerated. As the long-term survival of the elephant is in question, we must allow for populations to stabilize and recover. →



ABOVE: Ivory being loaded onto the crusher in Central Park, New York.

The state of New York represents one of the largest U.S. markets for elephant ivory and rhino horn, followed closely by California and Hawaii. In 2014, with bipartisan support, New York passed legislation banning the sale, purchase or trade of ivory and rhino horn. The state has seen a steady decline in the market ever since. Through the joint efforts of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, several major busts have taken place. Two of these, shortly before the Central Park ivory crush, yielded ivory worth \$4.5 million. All of those recovered items were included in the crush on August 3.

SENDING A MESSAGE

Speaking on behalf of WCS, John Calvelli, executive vice-president of public affairs, told the audience: “By crushing a ton of ivory in the middle of the world’s most famous public park, New Yorkers are sending a message to poachers, traffickers and dealers who try to set up shop right here in our streets: We won’t stand for the slaughter of elephants.”

Along with the U.S., China’s government has taken steps to safeguard elephants. By the end of 2017, China’s domestic ivory markets will be completely shut down, ending legal trade in the world’s largest markets. In March, most government-licensed ivory facilities were closed, with the rest set to follow suit by the end of the year.

Guest speaker David Gacheru, deputy chief of mission for the Kenyan embassy in the U.S., remarked: “The African elephant is an animal whose habitat is about a thousand miles away from New York, but whose emotional habitat is right here, in the hearts of all.”

AWF and our partners will continue to do the necessary work to stop the killing, stop the trafficking and stop the demand, and with increased collaboration with federal agencies and law enforcement, we can eliminate the markets within the United States and abroad.

—Raven Bradburn, Grace Wairima, Rory Skehan

DATA POINTS TO HOPE FOR ELEPHANTS

A 2016 report shows elephant populations in some African countries as stable or even increased, but the overall threat remains critical

With 20,000–30,000 killed every year, the threats to African elephants are dishearteningly real and urgent. But extraordinary things are happening across the continent — stories of survival and hope for this iconic species. One of the most authoritative recent works on the numbers of African elephants is the African Elephant Status Report 2016, published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Here are some metrics we can take away from the report:

- The population of elephants in Botswana is relatively healthy, estimated at 131,626.
- Zimbabwe has the second-highest population of elephants in Africa, estimated at 82,630. That figure, however, is 6 percent down from the last count.
- Tanzania’s elephant population is estimated at 50,433, Africa’s third-highest.
- Kenya had Africa’s fourth-largest population of elephants, estimated at 22,809 in 2015, and the number is stable or increasing; some say the population is higher but undoubtedly it is less than 30,000.
- Namibia comes in fifth, with 22,754 elephants, followed by Zambia with 21,967.
- In seventh place is South Africa, with 18,841. The main elephant population in Kruger National Park has increased substantially.
- In southern Africa, Mozambique comes next, with 10,884 elephants. However, that country has recorded a decline of 53 percent in the past five years.
- The W-Arli-Pendjari Complex, which spans the border areas of three West African countries — Niger, Burkina Faso and Benin — comes in ninth, with 8,953 elephants. That number represents a doubling of the population since 2003.
- South Sudan is tenth, with 7,103, followed by Gabon, with 7,058.

Although some of this data points to challenges ahead, much of it illustrates the ability and will to protect wildlife. In places where populations have diminished, we must continue protection efforts and allow time and space for recovery.



BILLY DOOSIN