

Forest Elephant Fact Sheet (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*)



Forest Elephants - a separate species

- DNA analysis has shown that African savannah and forest elephants are genetically different¹. Some scientists believe they should be considered as two separate species. Currently the forest-dwelling species is called *Loxodonta africana cyclotis*.
- Found in Central and West Africa, forest elephants may number from as few as 24,000 to as many as 209,000². The dramatic difference between these responsible estimates of their numbers underscores the need for better understanding of this species in the face of alarming evidence about current trends in habitat loss and poaching.
- The forest elephant is morphologically distinct from the savannah elephant - smaller in size, with smaller, more rounded ears, and straighter, thinner, more dense tusks³.
- The average family size of forest elephants is much smaller than that of the savannah species (3.2 individuals in the Dzanga National Park, Central African Republic⁴ vs. 10 in Manyara National Park, Tanzania⁵).

Why ivory trade poses a special threat to forest elephants

- Much forest elephant habitat lies within countries with a history of civil unrest and poverty, both of which increase the incentive for poaching.
- Logging roads are penetrating the equatorial African forests at a rapid rate, making remote areas more accessible, and bringing in workers who kill elephants for bushmeat as well as ivory. Despite the current ivory trade ban, in some Congo basin forests, it is estimated that 10% of the elephant population is poached annually⁶. If trade resumes, the level of illegal killing will increase, as tusks will be smuggled to countries where sales are profitable and legal.
- The ivory of forest elephants is denser than that of savannah elephants, and more desirable to carvers. Like the Asian elephant's similarly "hard" ivory, it fetches a higher price on the ivory market than ivory from savannah elephants.
- Forest elephants are difficult to census due to their dense habitat. Therefore, very few populations are being monitored and extensive poaching could occur before it was detected. For this reason forest elephants will be particularly vulnerable if trade resumes.

1. Roca et. al., Genetic evidence for two species of elephant in Africa, 2001.

2. African Elephant Status Report (AESR). IUCN African Elephant Specialist Group publication, November 2003.

3. Oxford Encyclopedia of Mammals, 2001.

4. Turkalo and Fay, Forest elephant behavior and ecology: observation from the Dzanga saline, 2001.

5. Moss, Portraits in the Wild, 1975.

6. ECOFAC, Le controle du commerce de l'ivoire ou la mission impossible, 2001.