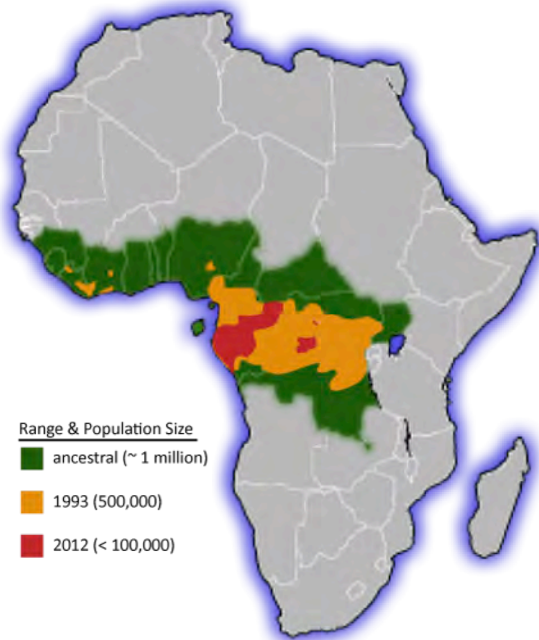




Forest Elephant Fact Sheet (*Loxodonta cyclotis*)



Forest elephant populations in West Africa are now highly fragmented and generally very small and threatened. In the 1990s, about 60% of forest elephants lived in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but are now nearly extirpated in those forests.

- Forest elephants are the least well known of the three species of elephants and are the only species with a chance to continue living a normal ‘wild’ existence.
- Found in Central and West Africa, forest elephants now number fewer than 100,000¹, down from about one million when Europeans first ventured into Central Africa.
- The forest elephant is morphologically distinct from the savannah elephant (*L. africana*) – smaller in size, smaller more rounded ears, and straighter, thinner, denser tusks².
- The average group size is 3.0 (mother and dependent offspring)³, but observations at forest clearings indicate larger associations among family groups, similar to the multi-tiered social system of savannah elephants.
- DNA analysis has shown that African savannah and forest elephants are genetically distinct⁴, reinforcing clear ecological differences.

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 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, it is estimated that 10-15% of the elephant population is poached annually⁵. The price of ivory on the world market has reached \$2100/lb – more than \$400,000 from one adult male.
- The ivory of forest elephants is denser and more desirable to carvers than ivory of the other species.
- Forest elephants are difficult to census due to their dense habitat, and poaching activity is harder to detect for the same reason. As enforcement strengthens elsewhere in Africa, poachers will increasingly target forest elephant populations.

References:

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5. Wittemyer, G. *et al.* 2014. Illegal killing for ivory drives global decline in African elephants. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 111(36):13117-13121.