

# The effects of the international ivory bans on Zimbabwe's ivory industry

Story and photos by Esmond Bradley Martin

***As the international ivory ban continues, Zimbabwe's once thriving ivory trade is becoming a white elephant.***

*The East African Wild Life Society remains committed to its stance supporting the International Ivory Ban.*

Until the various ivory bans were introduced worldwide in 1989, Zimbabwe had one of the largest, legal and well-managed ivory carving industries in Africa. In 1983, the 200 or so ivory craftsmen (182 legally registered with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management) consumed about 15 tonnes of raw ivory. The retail value that year for the total quantity of ivory pieces manufactured – mostly animal sculptures, chess sets, whole carved tusks, human heads, and jewellery – was approximately US\$ 8,000,000. Throughout the middle and late 1980s, the ivory industry continued to prosper. Rowan Martin of Zimbabwe's National Parks and Wildlife Department estimated in his report, 'The ivory trade in Southern Africa' (February 1989), that the industry used on average eight tonnes of legal ivory per annum from 1986 to 1988 plus not more than two tonnes a year of illegally obtained supplies.

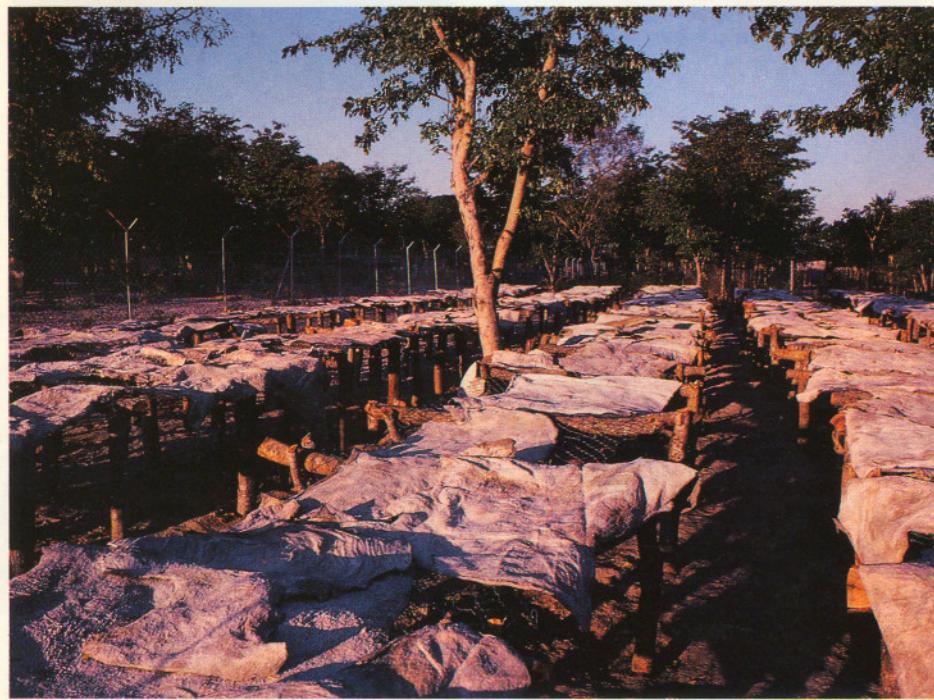
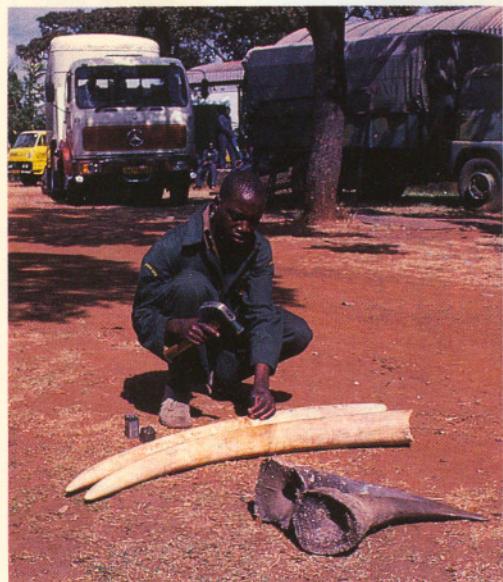
With the introduction of laws prohibiting imports of worked ivory items into consuming countries beginning in mid-1989, Zimbabwe's ivory industry started to decline. By September of that year, the largest ivory manufacturers in Zimbabwe, mostly in Harare, were in jeopardy; they were no longer able to sell their output to their traditional American and Japanese customers. Not only had it become illegal for buyers to import these items into their countries, but also, ivory had become unfashionable. By the time of my visit to Harare in November 1990, retail sales of ivory products had declined by at least 75 per cent. Zimbabwe's ivory industry is doing relatively better, however, than that in some of the Asian countries such as China. A few people from Europe, the Middle East and eastern Asia, and foreign diplomats (especially from Africa) are still

buying. They tend to prefer the more valuable pieces which are small and can be easily hidden in their luggage. The large ivory manufacturers have not reduced their ivory prices in Zimbabwe dollars in the last couple of years, because it is not the price that is deterring buyers, but simply the ban. In US dollars, the prices have in fact gone down by about 20 per cent due to the devaluation of the Zimbabwean currency.

Zimbabwe's Department of National Parks continues to sell some raw ivory to the country's ivory manufacturers at prices ranging from Zimbabwe dollar 212 or US\$ 74 per kilogramme for a small tusk of 3 kilogrammes to Zimbabwe dollar 334 or US\$ 117 per kilogramme for a large tusk of 20 kilogrammes (according to A. Conybear of the Department of National Parks). There is a serious shortage of work, however, and most of the ivory craftsmen have been forced to leave the ivory business. For example, in early 1989, the largest workshop in the country employed between 50 and 55 craftsmen solely working in ivory, but towards the end of 1990, only one full-time carver remained while two or three men worked part-time on ivory. About half the former ivory craftsmen had been made redundant. The remaining 25 or so were carving buffalo horn, stone and wood. These workers were being paid from US\$ 60 to US\$ 80 a week depending upon their skill and output. The few remaining ivory carvers were not earning much more. Furthermore, none of the craftsmen were being paid over-time any longer, as demand for wood and other carvings has not risen since the ivory bans, as had been hoped. The second largest ivory manufacturer has also suffered from a sharp fall in demand for his ivory products. He too has had to cut back his ivory work-

ers, from 40 in 1988 to ten today. Although foreign tourism has increased from 227,195 visitors in 1980 to 411,243 in 1989, there has not been a similar increase in sales of tourist carvings in Harare as visitors generally spend very little time in the capital, preferring to be in the wildlife areas. This has not helped the carving profession.

Despite the government of Zimbabwe taking out a legal reservation after the CITES meeting in Switzerland in October 1989, allowing their trade in raw and worked ivory to continue, the government and private businessmen have so far not been able to export officially and raw or much worked ivory. The reason is that the retail demand for finished ivory items in the main markets of the world has declined by about 75 per cent since the 1989 bans started. Worked ivory items are being exported from Zimbabwe and illegally imported into South Africa, however, as a way for Zimbabweans to earn scarce foreign exchange. I first wrote about this trade in 1984 in my article, 'Zimbabwe's Ivory Carving Industry', published in the *Traffic Bulletin* of 25 June 1984. At that time much worked ivory, such as jewellery, chess sets and carvings, were being dumped on to the South African market at prices sometimes 50 per cent lower than in Zimbabwe in order for Zimbabwean residents to obtain the South African rand. Rowan Martin investigated this trade and wrote about it in his previously mentioned 1989 report. He discovered that South African manufacturers believed that two to three tonnes of worked ivory items were annually being exported from Zimbabwe to South Africa in the middle and late 1980s and being sold well below market prices. This was having a detrimental effect on South Africa's own ivory carving industry. In



Clockwise from top:

Some of the finest ivory figurines carved in Africa are made in Zimbabwe.

The largest ivory factory in Zimbabwe employed over 50 craftsmen in the mid-1980s.

Before the ivory bans, public auctions were regularly held in Harare to sell raw tusks to overseas buyers and local traders.

After elephants were cropped, the hide was dried and tanned for export to Europe and the United States where it was used to make handbags, cowboy boots and personal accessories.

In the 1980s each tusk was marked by officials of National Parks and Wildlife Management Department.

## ... ivory

Rowan Martin's words, 'The fault lies not in the ivory control system, but in the draconian restrictions on foreign currency. Human ingenuity generally prevails in such circumstances'. Partly because of this trade, the South African industry, which consumed six tonnes of raw ivory in 1983, used just under one tonne in 1988. According to the traders in Harare, the main buyers of Zimbabwean ivory products for sale in Johannesburg are Taiwanese.

The international ivory bans have had one positive effect for several master carvers in Zimbabwe. They claim that because today's buyers want more valuable, higher quality ivory items, such as elephant and buffalo sculptures, they can now spend more time working on each piece in order to increase the intricacy and precision of their workmanship. One very artistic carver is now able to sell his small animal carvings from US\$ 1,000 to US\$ 3,500 each. Moreover, some of these expert craftsmen have been able to interest new buyers, especially Asians.

The people in Zimbabwe who have suffered the most from the bans are the local average craftsmen. Almost all of them are out of the ivory business. The government of Zimbabwe has not, to my knowledge, retrained the former ivory craftsmen for other professions as has been done recently by the Hong Kong government. Thus, it is the poorest members of the ivory industry who have been most devastatingly affected, as has happened in China and India. On the other hand, owners of the large ivory manufacturing companies have prospered in new enterprises, especially in the tourism sector. For example, formerly the largest ivory manufacturer has successfully diversified into the clothing industry.

It remains to be seen whether Zimbabwe's ivory trade will continue to dwindle or if some of the restrictions on the world's ivory markets will be lifted, enabling the country once again to prosper from its ivory carving industry. This decision, crucial to Zimbabwe, may be made at the next CITES meeting to be held in Japan in early 1992.

## Lion and the Tortoise

by Peter Davey

'Young lions are no different from any other young creatures in the wild . . . they have to learn, either by example, or the hard way . . . TRIAL AND ERROR? The Leopard Tortoise, (*Testudo pardalis*), is a common resident over much of East Africa, and has few enemies once it gets to a reasonable size. Its very tough shell (both top and bottom) and an ability to withdraw completely into it, makes things very difficult for any potential predator. It has another means of defence, also, which it uses

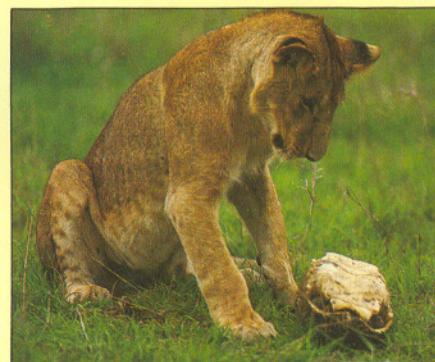
under severe stress, . . . it squirts a jet of foul smelling liquid from its rear end!

Lions, powerful though they are, in true cat fashion have an innate curiosity that often leads them into trouble.

This young male, who's full belly clearly shows the results of a recent meal, just could not resist having a go at this strange new creature moving in the grass . . . 'if it moves, it must be edible!'



A cautious approach, tap gently with paw. It stops . . . try the other side . . .



Now it is upside down . . . let's consider the matter . . .



OK . . . now give it a good bite . . .



A mouthful . . . won't do that again in a hurry . . .



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