



## ***Wildlife trade on e-commerce sites in China, with a focus on mammoth ivory: A Rapid Assessment***

**Assessing wildlife trade on e-commerce sites in China, with a focus on mammoth ivory**

***New report highlights concerns that the amount of mammoth ivory being sold legally may perpetuate the demand for illegal elephant ivory***

The Hague, the Netherlands, 3 November 2021 – The Wildlife Justice Commission today released a [new report](#) on the trade in illegal wildlife on Chinese e-commerce websites. The report ‘Wildlife trade on e-commerce sites in China, with a focus on mammoth ivory: A Rapid Assessment’ is the result of four months’ research conducted with the support of Peace Parks Foundation. The analysis of this research reveals that the majority of advertised wildlife products are legally permitted for sale. However, the prevalence of mammoth ivory found legally for sale raises concerns about perpetuating demand for elephant ivory products which is now illegal in China.

Researchers looked at Chinese e-commerce sites such as Alibaba and 1688.com and identified over 4,000 advertisements for wildlife, parts and products, where 85% of these advertisements were identified as referring to species defined as Not Protected – and hence legal. Products derived from mammoth ivory were by far the most common type of wildlife product being offered for sale.

Ivory products remain in high demand in China and the Wildlife Justice Commission is concerned about perpetuating demand for elephant ivory products. Recent reports from Japan also suggest that elephant ivory is being mislabelled and sold as mammoth ivory.

The Wildlife Justice Commission believes the sheer quantity of mammoth ivory products on the market is a reason for concern and represents a potential threat to the wild elephant population. A ban on elephant ivory is also due to come into effect in Hong Kong SAR at the end of this year and may create further pressure. Olivia Swaak-Goldman, Wildlife Justice Commission Executive Director: *“Law enforcement and policy makers must make efforts to understand how the legal mammoth ivory supply chain operates. Traditional ivory markets such as China, Hong Kong SAR, and Japan need to implement measures to ensure continued demand for ivory does not threaten wild elephants.”*

Traditional ivory carving skills are recognised as ‘an intangible national heritage’ in China. When the government announced in 2016 that a complete ban on the elephant ivory trade would be imposed the following year, it issued specific instruction to use [“replacement materials to develop other ... carving skills.”](#) Mammoth ivory is seen as one of the best alternatives for elephant ivory– and its trade is unregulated in China. Currently supplies of the material are plentiful as the thawing of the Arctic permafrost reveals woolly mammoth remains. “Mammoth hunting” has even become the main source of income in some remote areas in Siberia. But mammoth ivory is not a renewable resource, and the scale of the trade means supplies may not be able to keep up with demand. In northern Russia, recovering and selling mammoth tusks is the main source of income in the more remote areas, and in response to growing concerns about the environmental impact this may be having, Yakutia has now prohibited the export of all mammoth tusks more than three metres in length.





In 2019 [Israel and Kenya submitted a proposal to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species \(CITES\) to list the woolly mammoth](#) in Appendix 2 in order to regulate trade and prevent potential laundering of elephant ivory. The vote has been deferred until November 2022 and the Wildlife Justice Commission urges CITES to consider the findings of this report in any future research.

Our research was generously supported by Peace Parks Foundation. Peace Parks CEO Werner Myburgh commented that: *“Wildlife crime poses a serious threat to the vast areas of African wilderness that Peace Parks Foundation works to protect, not only destroying biodiversity, but also diminishing livelihoods and destabilising the sustainability of these protected areas. We are committed to developing well-considered methods through which to address issues at various critical points along this so-called ‘crime supply chain’. As a co-founder of the Wildlife Justice Commission, Peace Parks is therefore pleased to offer continued support to their invaluable research that informs effective strategies to combat the illegal trade of environmental products, thereby helping to secure those natural resources required to sustain life on earth.”*

This report is the second of a two-part series that the Wildlife Justice Commission is publishing into the use of alternative ivory-like products as a substitute for elephant ivory. The first report, *Giant clam shells, ivory, and organised crime: Analysis of a potential new nexus*, examines the rapid rise of the illegal trade in giant clam shells since 2019 and was released on 6 October 2021.

*Note to editor:*

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*The [Wildlife Justice Commission](#) is a non-profit organisation based in The Hague, the Netherlands, and established in March 2015 with the mission to disrupt and help dismantle transnational criminal networks trading in wildlife, timber and fish. We do this by collecting evidence and turning it into accountability.*

