

# Elephants Worth More Alive Than Dead

## Tourism revenue outweighs profits from poaching

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A report from the [David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust](#) found that elephants are worth much more when they're alive—about 76 times as much—than when they're poached for their ivory. Tusks sell for about \$21,000 on the black market, whereas a live elephant brings in more than \$1.6 million in ecotourism dollars.

The report ([PDF](#)) analyzes data from January to August of this year. Overall, 43 shipments of illegal ivory were seized worldwide, containing 17.8 metric tons from an estimated 1,940 elephants. The total value was estimated at more than \$37 million.

Had those elephants been kept alive, their combined worth in ecotourism would have been \$44.5 million this year—\$23,000 per elephant per year. That amounts to \$1.6 million over an elephant's lifetime. The authors looked at ecotourism camps, photography tours, and safaris in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, and South Africa.

“Protecting elephants makes monetary sense,” Rob Branford, director of the Sheldrick Trust's iWorry awareness campaign, wrote in the report. “Data of this type can be used to show key decision makers that elephant conservation is a far more viable economic proposition than the ivory trade.”

The reported seizures still only account for about 10 percent of the illegal ivory trade. [Mongabay](#) estimates that 178 tons of ivory from 19,400 dead elephants have been trafficked this year.

According to iWorry data, 90 percent of profits from illegal ivory ends up in the hands of terrorist and criminal groups. [The Independent reports](#) that the elephant population could be wiped out in two decades if the ivory trade doesn't slow down.

The report proposes several solutions to stem poaching and promote elephant tourism, including greater funding for anti-poaching operations, education about the value of elephants in communities where poachers are drawn from, and tourism initiatives that bring tangible benefits to the communities.