

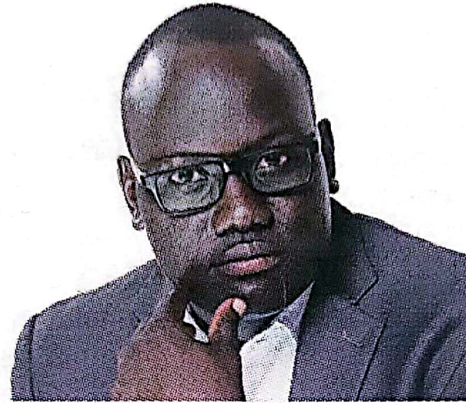
Joshua Poro, publicist

Let's save the elephant population

The largest of all land beasts – elephants – are thundering, trumpeting six-tonne monuments to the wonder of evolution. From the tip of that distinctive trunk with its 100,000 sharp muscles; to their outsize ears that flap the heat away; to the complex matriarchal societies (a society headed by female elephants) and the mourning of their dead; to the points of their ivory tusks, designed to defend, but ultimately the cause of their ruin. Did you know that elephant ears are said to be a geographical guide. In Asia, elephants have smaller India-shaped ears. While in Africa, their huge ears are the shape of the whole continent.

In 1800, there may have been 26 million elephants in Africa alone, although it is hard to be precise. But today, after years of poaching and habitat destruction, those numbers are a tiny fraction of what they once were. In Africa, elephants are a step closer to extinction. Less than half a million roam the continent, mostly in the southern states, in the west and the forested centre.

Elephants are in a particularly perilous condition. Nothing pushes a species to extinction like wiping out its habitat. For thousands of years ivory has been prized and elephants have been killed for it. The



Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen was laid to rest around 1323BC on a headrest of ivory, while in Syria elephants were more or less wiped out for their ivory by 500BC.

The invention of guns increased the pressure. The 19th century brought a fashion for big game hunting among colonialists, which wiped out herds across the continent of Africa. Now the remaining dwindling numbers face the threat of local hunters and modern poaching gangs, financed by Asian syndicates and armed by the conflicts of Africa. Some experts see the brutal killings of elephants not as a battle for a commodity, but for land. As the human population booms, so does demand for space. Poaching conveniently removes

elephants from the land, leaving it open to development. This is a pattern seen across West Africa, where elephant declines have been swift. By 2050, 63% of the remaining elephant range-lands will be compromised by human encroachment.

In spite of the global ban on international trade (overseen by the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species – Cites) the illegal ivory trade has exploded for markets, especially in China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand and an upcoming market in Europe. In 2011, seizures hit a peak of 23 metric tonnes – 2,500 elephants were killed. But that is only a fraction.

According to UWA, Uganda had above 5,564 elephants between 2011 – 2014. Around 20,000 African elephants were killed last year for their tusks, more than were born. Asian markets are financing a hunger for ivory that threatens to bring an end to wild elephants within our lifetime.

There has never been a more dangerous time to be an elephant than now. No time since history has an elephant been more likely to fall to a gun than today. Let's save an elephant.

The writer is the head of media at Natural Resource Conservation Network