



Forest elephant family, Dzanga National Park, Central African Republic



Forest elephant range states

Forest Elephants - a separate species

DNA analysis has recently shown that African savannah and forest elephants are genetically distinct enough to be considered two separate species. Scientists refer to the forest-dwelling species as *Loxodonta cyclotis*¹.

Found in central and west Africa, forest elephants represent one-third of all elephants on the African continent².

The forest elephant is morphologically distinct from the savannah elephant - smaller in size, with more rounded ears, and straighter, thinner tusks³.

The average family size of forest elephants is much smaller than that of the savannah species (2.8 individuals in the Dzanga National Park, Central African Republic⁴ vs. 10 in Manyara National Park, Tanzania⁵).

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 African 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, in some Congo basin forests, it is estimated that 10% of the elephant population is poached annually⁶. If trade resumes, the level of illegal killing will increase, as tusks will be smuggled to countries where sales are profitable and legal.

The ivory of forest elephants is denser than that of savannah elephants, and more desirable to carvers. Like the Asian elephant's similarly "hard" ivory, it fetches a higher price on the ivory market than ivory from savannah elephants.

Forest elephants are difficult to census due to their dense habitat. Therefore, very few populations are being monitored and extensive poaching could occur before it was detected. For this reason forest elephants will be particularly vulnerable if trade resumes.

1. Roca et al., Genetic evidence for two species of elephant in Africa, 2001, 2. African Elephant Database, 1998 3. Oxford Encyclopedia of Mammals, 20014. Turkalo, Studying Forest Elephants by direct Observation in the Dzanga clearing, 1996 5. Moss, Portraits in the Wild, 1975 6. ECOFAC, Le controle du commerce de l'ivoire ou la mission impossible, 2001.