

Project Update: May 2020

1. Compilation of ivory supply-related records

The first field trip to Thailand was undertaken between November 2019 and February 2020. I visited eight offices of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plant Conservation (DNP) in different parts of Thailand. The purpose of visits was to liaise with responsible staff for organising data compilation on the raw ivory volume of the commercial trade. These offices were responsible for the most active ivory shops in the country. The data required extracting from records available in hard copies into digital files. Data compilation and input into a computer is being carried out by local staff in different offices.

I also liaised with the Department of Provincial Administration and Department of Livestock Development to compile data on domesticated elephant and ivory movement.



Data compilation from regional offices

2. Interviews

2.1 Elephant owners n= 20

I conducted 20 interviews with 21 elephant owners in Surin (known as the home of elephant), Sukhothai, Prachin, Krabi, Phang-nga, Trang, and Nakhon Si Thammarat. Participants comprised general elephant owners as well as elephant camp businesses. Cutting ivory is a historical practice amongst elephant owners. Most owners sell the ivory, with the money supporting their life in different ways. Mostly, ivory is not regularly cut; trimming depends on elephant health and the owner's needs. The flow of raw materials to buyers (including ivory shops) mainly occurs via personal connection. Elephant owners in Surin bargain with a potential buyer (mainly local ivory traders) prior to cutting ivory. The price of raw ivory is negotiable, ranging from 30,000 – 50,000 Thai Bahts (USD 1,000-1,600) per kg, dependent upon ivory size and condition, as well as reputation of the elephant. For example, ivory pieces trimmed from a well-known elephant ask a price of up to 60,000 Bahts (USD1900)/kg.



Interviews of elephant owners

2.2 Ivory traders and carvers n =10

Trader interviews have been done with 13 traders in Uthaitхани, Nakhonsawan, Surin, Sukhothai and Bangkok. The traders all speak about declining ivory consumption as a result of the country's economy and the 2015 legal reform. The traders referred to the realisation/concern of customers about the legal requirements in ivory buying and possessing. Ivory shops have slow stock movement in regard to both selling and buying. Some traders reported that no new stock have been added since the legal reform. For those with an active trade, there is no problem about restocking or seeking raw materials.

The traders in Surin prefer to source raw ivory from other regions because of the lower price.

I also talked to ivory carvers in Surin and Chainat, and an ex-trader in Burirum. This group of craftsmen seem to be heavily affected by the 2015 legal reform because of the decrease of carving work since then. Cattle bone and wood have become alternative materials whilst ivory carving work is diminishing. Some carvers have changed jobs altogether.



Interviews of ivory trader (left) and carver (right)

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data entry in Thailand was initially planned to be completed around August 2020,

however, extension of work may be needed. Implementation of work-from-home measures may delay data compilation as it is unlikely to bring ivory-related records/document (government document) for recording the data while being home. In addition, a fieldtrip to Thailand, planned to occur around July/August 2020 to finalise data compilation, is likely to be cancelled due to international travel restrictions.