

Springboard^{into} Comprehension 5

Main Idea	Bukit Timah Nature Reserve The Nelson Mandela Story
Compare and Contrast	Animals under Threat Soccer v Ballet
Fact and Opinion	The Great Rainbow Hill Council Debate The Smith Family Diaries
Cause and Effect	It's Just Not Right Save Our Planet!
Bias and Prejudice	What's Up? Changing Times
Figurative Language	Sports Mad Magazine The Highwayman

RA 10.5–11.5

Explanation



It's Just Not Right



Written by Susie Brown

It's Just Not Right

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Introduction

There are about 1.5 million different species of animals that people know about. Scientists estimate that there are many more still to be discovered. All animal species in a place interact with each other and their environment. Scientists call this an ecosystem. Animals in an ecosystem live together in a delicate balance. Most species need their specific habitat to survive. Human activities affect the way ecosystems work. They can upset the delicate balance between the species. People can change population numbers and entire habitats. This has put many species at risk.

Trading wildlife is one human activity that threatens many species. The wildlife trade is a booming industry around the globe. Every year, people trade millions of wildlife products, such as foods, leather, and medicines. They traffic live animals around the world, too. Hunting is another human activity that puts many species at risk. Every year, hunters kill millions of animals for parts such as their skin, teeth, or meat. This has led to a decline in many animal populations.

As the number of humans grows, people need more and more land to live and grow food on. Every time people take over an area, there is less land and food available for wildlife. Many animals have nowhere else to go. This habitat loss has led to a decrease in the numbers of animals.

Thousands of different groups have formed to protect species at risk. These groups try to find solutions to problems that affect wildlife. They aim to find ways for people and animals to live together. They educate people about the importance of protecting wildlife. They also work to get governments to protect native species. In some cases, these groups have been successful. Despite their efforts, though, people continue to be a threat to wildlife in many places.

People in the United States protesting against the hunting of deer with bows and arrows

The horns, bones, skulls, and teeth of many endangered animals for sale in Burma (Myanmar)



Ivory Trade

Ivory is a hard substance. It makes up the tusks of animals such as elephants, walruses, and narwhals. Ivory is tough and long lasting. Therefore, people used it to make many different objects, such as piano keys and ornaments. Because of its uses, there was a lot of demand for ivory. Consequently, people hunted many animals for their tusks. Then, they sold the ivory for a lot of money. This led to a booming ivory trade.

Hunters have killed elephants for their ivory for a long time. African elephants' large tusks have a lot of ivory. This made them a target for the ivory trade. Hunters killed African elephants in such large numbers that they were at risk of dying out. When people hunt animals to the brink of extinction, it is called **overhunting**. Due to overhunting, African elephant numbers became dangerously low during the 1980s. By 1989, estimates say that the ivory trade had halved the number of African elephants.

A third of the length of an elephant's tusk is inside its skull. For that reason, hunters need to kill an elephant to get its tusks. The hunters first shoot the elephant. Once the animal is dead, the hunters use an axe to cut off the elephant's trunk. Then, they use the axe to hack out the tusks. Usually, when hunters kill an elephant for ivory, they take only the tusks. They leave the rest of the elephant's body to rot. This terrible method, and the low numbers of elephants, led to conservation groups taking action.



This photograph from 1921 shows a man posing with tusks that were later used in billiard ball production.

The beads of this necklace are made of ivory.



Tusks begin to appear at age two in young African elephants such as these ones in a herd in Amboseli National Park in Kenya.



The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is an agreement between over 170 countries. CITES aims to ensure wildlife trade does not threaten species' survival. In 1989, CITES banned all trade in ivory. Many people believe this ban worked. It kept the numbers of elephants from decreasing further. They believe it saved the elephants from extinction.

However, many people continue to kill elephants illegally. This unlawful practice is called **poaching**. Poachers then sell the ivory on the market that trades in illegal goods, the **black market**. Today, the ivory industry is still responsible for the deaths of thousands of elephants each year.

In 1997, CITES agreed to lift part of the ban. It allowed three African countries to sell their stockpiles of ivory. These stockpiles had been confiscated from poachers. The money made from selling the ivory was to be used to protect other elephants. In 2008, CITES voted to lift part of the ban again. This allowed more countries to sell a set amount of confiscated ivory.

A national parks official walking through a warehouse with ivory obtained from legal population control and natural deaths at the Kruger National Park, South Africa

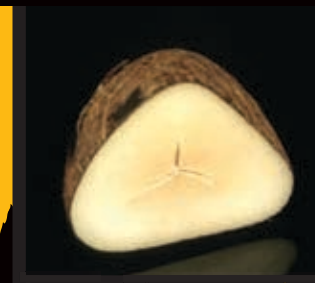


Some people claimed that the rising numbers of elephants had caused problems. Sometimes, the elephants threatened people or ate farmers' crops. Some people say the elephants damaged the environment. This led to governments killing thousands of elephants to reduce their numbers again. This form of population control is called **culling**.

Today, many people are working to take ivory off the black market. They use other materials, such as plastic, to make objects that were once made from ivory. They can use a hard nut called vegetable ivory, too. If ivory is no longer needed to make objects, then there might be less demand for it. Therefore, fewer African elephants will die.



The tagua palm tree has seeds (below) that look and feel like ivory when carved into ornaments, such as the ones in the photograph above.



African Elephant Numbers and Ivory Trade

