

The Pink Tusk Theory: Real Facts About an Elephant with Tusks

Debbie Ethell: Someone photoshops a picture and suddenly pink tusks are a *thing*.

Ahhh, the dreaded Pink Tusk Theory. This is something I get asked about *all the time*. So let's dispel this myth once and for all.

Somewhere in the great world wide web, someone thought if they used a bit of photoshop and actually showed an elephant's tusk dyed pink then that would be the golden solution to solving the poaching crisis. Sounds a bit too good to be true, doesn't it? As it turns out ... it actually is.

First of all, if this were actually possible I want you to think about just how massive a full-grown elephant is. Do you think a wild elephant would simply sit still and let a human paint its tusks?

No, that would be ridiculous right? So you have to anesthetize it and this all by itself creates a whole host of problems. For a veterinarian to anesthetize an elephant they have to guess how much that particular elephant weighs. This can be quite tricky because if they underestimate the weight, you risk that elephant not being fully put to sleep and then you have to wait several days to do it again or you could accidentally overdose it. Secondly, if you overestimate the size of the elephant you risk killing it, which is actually more common than you might think.

Hi Everyone I'm Debbie Ethell, executive director of The KOTA Foundation for Elephants as well as a conservation research scientist.

You can see that the very idea of tracking and anesthetizing a group of elephants is quite traumatic to those elephants, not only does it put their health at great risk, it is also incredibly expensive. And simply using paint to coat a tusk doesn't work anyway.

Elephants are constantly rubbing, digging, and using their tusks for a whole host of reasons, not to mention the elements, hot days, cool nights, water, mud, and dust. All of this wear and tear would strip any paint off a tusk within days if not hours and then you're stuck having to repeat the entire process all over again.

Lastly, who's to say poachers could care if tusks are pink, red, blue, or yellow? In fact, there is more evidence suggesting the opposite – I mean can you imagine how much easier it would be to spot an elephant if their tusks were brightly colored?

So let's put the Pink Tusk Theory to rest once and for all, shall we? And instead concentrate on what we know with absolute certainty *does* work.

If you want to be part of a real solution then stop the trade. Never buy or sell ivory. *Ever*. And remember the tusk of an elephant can only come from a dead elephant. Let's leave them where they belong.

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