

Wildlife Protection and Conservation: The Truth About Elephant Poaching

Debbie Ethell: Just who is the poacher? Is it one guy? Is it 20 guys? Is it a grandmother? Or is it you?

One of the most hot-button issues I notice on the internet is how worked up everyone gets at “the poacher.” But who is that exactly?

In order to break down who “the poacher” is let’s compare it to something we can easily relate to, the drug dealer. One of the things we are seeing with the illegal wildlife trafficking trade is that it mimics the illegal drug trade down to the T.

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

It all begins with the Spotters. These are highly trained individuals, usually one or two local villagers who are highly specialized trackers of elephants.

The Shooters are usually also local villagers with sophisticated high-powered rifles. Again, one to three individuals who are guided into position by the Spotters. They kill the elephants, remove the ivory, and hide it, usually by burying it to avoid detection.

Then you have the Transporters. These are one or two people from an ivory transport location, such as a port town. They drive out to the secret location given to them by the Shooters, collect the ivory, and drive it back to the place it will be shipped from.

The office people are the Communicators. They’re held up in some office close to the shipping location wheeling and dealing, recruiting buyers when they know a shipment of ivory is coming in.

And finally, we arrive at the Kingpins. Imagine Pablo Escobar. The top of the food chain. The maker of madness. He makes the most profit off of selling it. It gets transported through various channels until he is in possession of the white gold. The Kingpins are the hardest to track down because of their enormous power and wealth.

That brings us to the sixth level of poacher.

If you buy or sell ivory, no matter how small, then simply by being complicit you too, are just as responsible as any of the other previous levels of poachers.

The United States is #2 in the world for illegal wildlife trafficking which includes ivory. If the second largest buyer in the world removed itself from the market then just imagine what would happen to the rest of the market. If there's no buyer then there is no market. And the ONLY thing we have to do...the one thing that we know works...is to never buy or sell ivory. Ever.