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Animals™**

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Society of the United States and
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Ivory products for sale across Pennsylvania

Undercover investigation underscores the need for a state law to combat trade in wildlife products

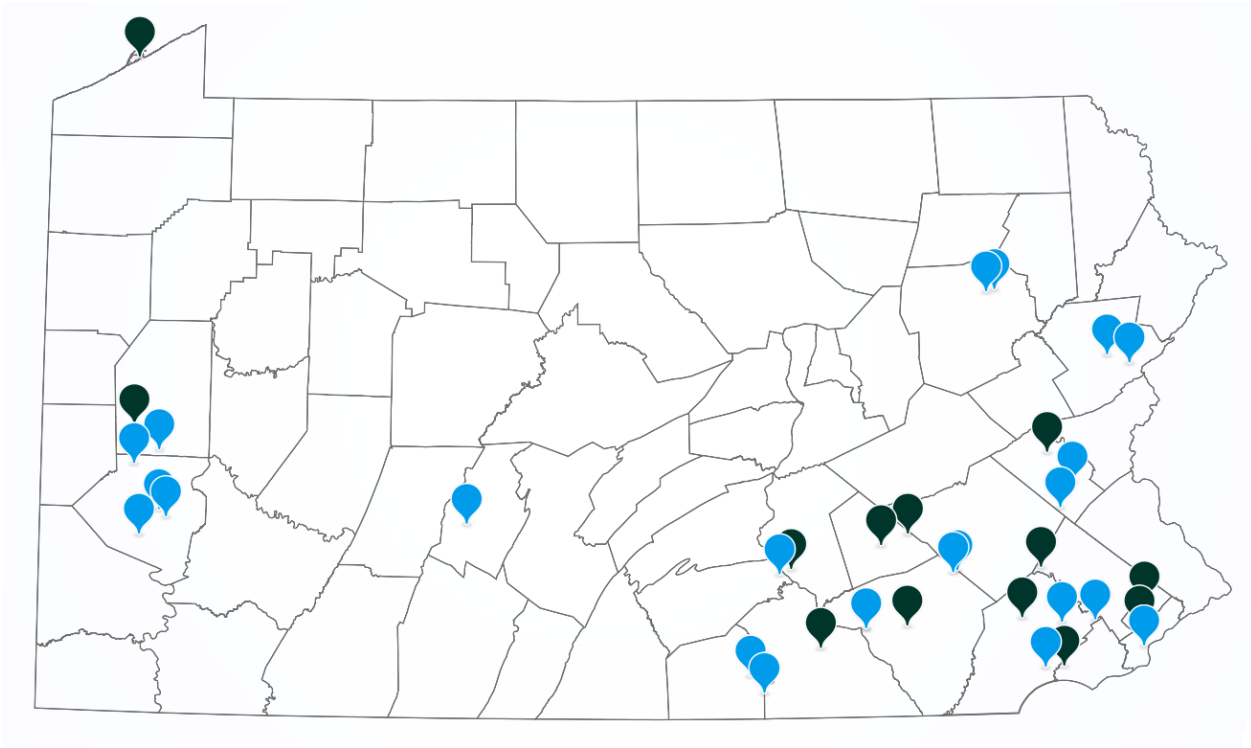
An undercover investigation by Humane World for Animals—formerly called the Humane Society of the United States—found nearly 400 items identified as ivory for sale within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Investigators visited 31 stores across the state in March 2025 and searched more than 32 online auctions and marketplace sales occurring from January 2025 to April 2025.

The items viewed showed signs of originating from elephants, whales, walruses, hippos, warthogs or mammoths or were ivory of undetermined origin. In Kingston, Pennsylvania, the investigator also found the taxidermized head, neck and shoulders of a giraffe for sale.

When asked by the investigator, none of the sellers had or could provide any information or documentation to verify the age or origin of the ivory items, and some of the ivory was labeled with evasive or misleading information. Without such documentation, it is impossible to know whether those items were imported in violation of federal law.



Physical (blue) and online (green) locations where wildlife products were found for sale



The investigation found that:

- Of the 63 locations investigated, 37 of them, or 59%, had identified ivory or other wildlife products for sale.
- Of the 63 locations investigated, 17 of them, or 27%, had identified elephant ivory for sale.
- Of the 27 counties with locations investigated in Pennsylvania, 67% had ivory or other wildlife products for sale.
- A total of 383 pieces of ivory were identified by our investigative team in person and online.
- The listed value of items found in person and online totaled nearly \$38,000. The most expensive ivory item was advertised for \$1,150, while some items were advertised for as little as \$5. The giraffe trophy was advertised for \$6,000.

At some stores, some of the likely ivory was labeled as “bone,” a possibly intentional tactic we and others have witnessed elsewhere as a means to obscure the trade in these items, perhaps in response to efforts to curb the trade in ivory or because an increasing percentage of consumers understand that purchasing ivory is harmful to elephant populations.

Our investigative team previously conducted investigations of wildlife product sales in Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon and Washington, D.C. Ivory is distinguishable from other materials because of its color, high glossiness, cool temperature, weight and density and the presence of graining and ultraviolet fluorescence. Ivory has a white/blue fluorescence while manufactured substitutes exhibit a dull blue or yellowish appearance.

Ivory items for sale included:

- Jewelry, including earrings, bracelets, pendants, bangles, broaches, pins, rings and necklaces
- Figurines, including netsukes (miniature carvings)
- Tusk and tooth carvings and pieces
- Cutlery, utensils and knives
- Medical tools
- Game pieces and accessories
- Cigarette holders
- Letter openers
- Button hooks
- Scrimshaw art
- A toothpick holder
- A pen casing and a pen holder
- A picture frame
- A bottle

Background

Many species, such as elephants, rhinos, giraffes, pangolins and sharks, are threatened because of the wildlife trade, and demand for their parts in the U.S. is a serious driver of such trade.

Laws governing the sale of certain wildlife products are complicated. Pennsylvania law generally prohibits the in-state sale of animal parts of species, such as elephants, that are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. However, such sales can be allowed in some circumstances.

Remaining gaps in coverage could easily be addressed by changes to Pennsylvania law. Pennsylvania Rep. Leanne Krueger (D-Delaware) has introduced HB 994, a bill that, if passed, would limit in-state sales of imperiled species, such as giraffes and hippos, that are not currently protected under the federal ESA or Pennsylvania law. Notably, the Humane World for Animals investigation found items from both species for sale in Pennsylvania.

Rep. Krueger's bill would also cover other highly traded wildlife species, including sharks and pangolins. Under her bill, moreover, the in-state sale of mammoth and mastodon ivory would generally be prohibited, limiting the possibility that trade in ivory from these extinct animals could provide sellers with cover to sell similar-looking ivory from contemporary imperiled species such as elephants.

While existing Pennsylvania law generally prohibits the intrastate sale of ivory from elephants and other species protected under the federal ESA without permit, it does not do so explicitly, instead broadly prohibiting sale of any species protected under the federal ESA without directly identifying those species.

As this investigation shows, many Pennsylvania vendors continue to sell elephant ivory in spite of existing state-level prohibitions, perhaps suggesting confusion about the coverage of existing law. The proposed bill would not only protect imperiled species if any provisions for their protection were removed at the federal level, but also provide needed clarity by expressly prohibiting commerce in elephant ivory in the state.

Lawmakers in 13 states and Washington, D.C., have enacted laws in recent years to ban the sale of ivory and other wildlife products within their own borders, protecting wildlife and ending their jurisdiction's role in creating markets for cruel products made from the body parts of animals. Pennsylvania can extend this trend toward expanded protection by taking steps to end its own participation in the cruel trade of products of imperiled species.

Species at risk

In Africa, the population of savanna elephants has declined by 60% since 1965, and that of forest elephants by more than 86% since 1984. Poaching elephants for their ivory continues to threaten these animals. Poaching impacts not only the individual animals who lose their lives but also the well-being of their families and the ecosystem that depends on that species.

With fewer than 69,000 mature individuals remaining in the wild, giraffe populations have dropped nearly 40% because of habitat loss, civil unrest, poaching and human-caused habitat changes. The U.S. is the top importer and exporter of giraffe parts, including their heads, legs, tails and skins.

Wild hippos are in a precarious position too, with populations declining as much as 20% between 1996 and 2008. The U.S. is the primary driver of demand for hippo products, responsible for nearly half of global imports between 2019 and 2021. At least 3,081 hippos were killed to meet U.S. demand between 2009 and 2018.



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