



## Atlantic awayday .....

A species of crab usually found in the 'Bermuda Triangle' area of the western Atlantic has washed up off the coast of Cornwall. The Columbus crab was identified by a marine biologist from the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth.



## Bats roost boost .....

# 14

The number of new bat roosts discovered in National Trust for Scotland properties during an eight-week survey. It amounted to 515 'new' bats, including pipistrelles, brown long-eareds, Daubenton's and noctules.

# NEWS OF THE EARTH

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Money raised from selling stockpiled ivory will be put into conservation, but will the auctions increase or decrease elephant poaching?

## SELL-OFF OR SELL-OUT?

Legal one-off sales of stockpiled ivory has divided conservationists on whether elephants will suffer increased poaching. Dan Stiles reports.

### BACKGROUND

#### CITES APPROVED SALES

- » Since the first CITES-approved ivory sales took place in southern Africa to Japan in 1999, Dan Stiles and Esmond Martin have carried out ivory-trade research in more than 30 countries, as reported in previous issues of *BBC Wildlife Magazine*.
- » They collected data on changing prices, numbers of carvers and numbers of ivory outlets and items seen and interviewed hundreds of ivory workers.
- » They found no evidence that the CITES ivory sales stimulated ivory demand. Rather, they concluded that ivory demand has been rising because Asians are getting richer with economic development. Ivory has been part of Asian culture for centuries.
- » To stop elephant poaching, they argue that China, Japan and other countries must ban the domestic ivory trade. Alternatively, a legal ivory supply (such as through the CITES-approved sales) must be made available.

**DEALERS FROM** China and Japan have bought more than 100 tonnes of ivory from 4 Southern African countries following long-awaited sales sanctioned by wildlife trade authorities.

The controversial auctions have split conservation groups – some say they will reduce ivory smuggling, while others are concerned they will ignite the illegal ivory trade and lead to an increase in elephant poaching.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) banned ivory sales in 1989, but at the end of 2008, it allowed Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to sell off stockpiles (accumulated from illegal-trade

seizures and culling) after these countries demonstrated they had sound wildlife management and growing elephant populations. There was also a one-off sale in 1999, to Japan only.

The latest auctions raised \$15.4m (£10m); the money will be used for conservation and rural development.

Wildlife authorities will be assessing the impact the sales have on poaching. Thanks to the Elephant Trade Information System (ETIS), it's known that China is the biggest smuggler of illicit ivory, while Japan was recently implicated in some seizures in Africa.

Some eminent conservationists have spoken out strongly against the sales. Richard Leakey, the former head of Kenya's wildlife service, said he was concerned.

"The entry of China is an ill-advised move that will only serve to open up the illegal ivory markets."

# 100

The number of seizures of illegal ivory made by China in 2008, 63 per cent of the total during the year.

#### POACHING BOON?

Will Travers of Born Free was also alarmed. "For many of the most vulnerable elephant populations, any

increased poaching pressure will almost certainly result in localised extinction," he said.

But trafficking expert John Sellar, who works for CITES,

defended the sales. "We are convinced that allowing this legal trade should help to impact upon illegal activities."

The logic for this view is that the average price paid for the legal ivory was \$152/kg (£100), while smuggled ivory can fetch five times as much as that in East Asia. The pro-lobby argues that legal ivory can undercut the trade and put poachers out of business.

ETIS and the Monitoring the Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) programme will monitor future ivory demand and elephant poaching. Trade opponents, such as the Environmental Investigation Agency and the International Fund for Animal Welfare, will also examine the effects of the sales.