

Undocumented ivory offered for sale across Maryland

Undercover investigation reveals the need for a state law to combat trade in elephant ivory and other parts and products from imperiled species



Elephant tusk carving with elephant motif for sale at Emporium Antiques in Frederick

An undercover investigation from July to December 2021 by the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International found hundreds of items likely made from ivory—in the form of carved elephant tusks, figurines, trinkets and jewelry—for sale across the state of Maryland. The state has no law prohibiting intrastate trade in wildlife products such as ivory and rhino horn. Federal law prohibits the import, export and interstate trade of elephant ivory, with limited exceptions, and rhino horn. However, federal law does not address sales within a state. Legislation has been introduced in the Maryland General Assembly that would prohibit the sale of parts and products from at-risk species within Maryland.

An HSUS/HSI investigator found these products for sale at 20 Maryland retailers in Kensington, Annapolis, Hagerstown, Frederick and other locations. Several sellers told the investigator, “We’re not supposed to say it’s ivory” when questioned about items that appeared to be made from ivory.

Among the items for sale were carved elephant tusks and ivory beads, boxes and figurines.

When asked by the investigator, none of the sellers had 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.

This current investigation reinforces findings from a previous Maryland investigation. In 2017, HSUS investigators visited numerous antique stores and sellers across Maryland that appeared to be selling [elephant ivory](#).

Legislation to address intrastate sale of these products has been introduced in the Maryland General Assembly, [HB 52](#) sponsored by Del. Sara Love, and [SB 381](#) sponsored by Sen. Will Smith.

This legislation will ensure that Maryland does not play a role in facilitating the trade in illegally acquired body parts from imperiled species by prohibiting the sale of parts and products from bonobos, cheetahs, chimpanzees, elephants, gorillas, jaguars, leopards, lions, orangutans, rhinos, giraffes, hippos and pangolins.

Twelve states, and Washington, D.C., have enacted similar measures in recent years.

For more information, contact wildlife@humanesociety.org.

All photos by the HSUS.

The United States is among the world's largest markets for illegal wildlife goods, including elephant ivory and rhino horn. The illegal wildlife trade is a lucrative, multi-billion-dollar enterprise, fueling transnational crime and incentivizing the cruel killing of animals for their parts.

Legal ivory marketplaces provide an opportunity for illegal ivory to flourish because of the ease of mixing the two. A lack of resources and the difficulty of visually distinguishing illegal ivory from legally acquired ivory often hamper enforcement efforts.

Each year, as many as [15,000 elephants](#) are killed in Africa to supply the demand for their ivory. [A recent assessment](#) found the population of savanna elephants has declined by 60% and forest elephants by more than 86% since the 1970s, placing them a step or two away from extinction.

Evidence shows that the U.S. is a [significant destination market](#) for giraffe specimens. Between 2006 and 2015, approximately 40,000 giraffe parts and products were imported into the U.S.



Apparent ivory necklaces for sale at Antique Crossroads in Hagerstown



Ivory pendant for sale at Bijoux Jewels in Baltimore

Investigator's findings at Maryland stores:

- The Cusp of Extinction, Kensington: "doctor doll," elephant-shaped pendant
- M.O.B. Vintage, Kensington: medium-sized "made in India" figure, beaded necklace
- G & G Antiques, Kensington: two small jewelry pieces
- Jantiques, Kensington: 15 or so small pieces, medium-size figurine
- Antique Crossroads, Hagerstown: two dozen or so beaded necklaces, about half a dozen tiny netsukes, suspected giraffe leg bone lamp also found
- Antique Depot, Ellicott City: beaded necklace
- Beaver Creek Antique Market, Hagerstown: several suspected ivory figurines labeled "bone"
- Bijoux Jewels, Baltimore: "woolly mammoth" pendant
- Cannon Hill Place, Frederick: beaded necklace
- Blue Crab Antiques, Annapolis: two figures, pair of candle holders, a few jewelry pieces, several lamp finials
- BonVivant Antiques, Annapolis: four napkin holders
- Evergreen Antiques and True Vintage, Annapolis: two small figures
- Natalie Silitch, Annapolis: beaded necklace
- Emporium Antiques, Frederick: carved tusk, round box, numerous figurines, several jewelry pieces
- Old Glory Marketplace, Frederick: bracelet, beaded necklace, numerous small trinkets, knitting needle
- Emmitsburg Antique Mall, Emmitsburg: two medium-size figures
- Frizellburg Antique Store, Westminster: three beaded necklaces
- Old Town Antiques, Gaithersburg: netsuke, pin, pendant
- Silk Road Antiques, Edgewater: ivory flower pin
- The Antique Center at Historic Savage Mill, Savage: 100 or so figurines and other pieces for sale by multiple vendors