

NGO survey finds Japanese Internet auction sites awash in ivory listings



A survey of Japanese Internet auction sites has revealed an average of more than 20 new and potentially illegal listings for ivory products per day.

The auction site survey -- conducted by the Japanese branch of the non-government organization Traffic, which monitors the international animal trade -- also revealed that many of the listings do not mention a country of origin or other vital information, suggesting some of the items may be connected to the illegal trade in animals and animal products.

"There is a real danger that customers on Internet auction sites, which are so easy to access and use, will unwittingly commit a crime by buying illegal items," says Kahoru Kanari, who headed the Traffic survey. "I hope auction site users will carefully check to make sure the seller has properly attached documents certifying the products were legally imported from the country of origin or registration cards under Japan's Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna.

Trade in ivory is almost entirely banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, otherwise known as the Washington Convention. Traffic surveyed two of Japan's largest auction sites from March through June 2009, monitoring the number of products made from the primary 13 species covered by the Washington Convention listed at any given time, and also the number of new listings per week.

A total of 1,306 ivory products were listed for auction during the survey period, along with 543 turtle shell items and seven tiger items. There were also listings for 56 varieties of live birds and lizards. Out of the 109 ivory items that had actually been bid on, 11 were listed by sellers willing to ship overseas -- a direct violation of the international ivory trade ban.

Furthermore, in addition to the average 179 ivory products posted for auction per week, Traffic recorded an average of 50 turtle shell items, 71.5 alligator and crocodile products, 44 caviar and sturgeon items, and 25.5 arowana fish listings, among others.

Japan is a signatory to the Washington Convention, and trade in endangered animals is tightly controlled under the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna. Under the law, the import and domestic trade of rare animals or their derivatives is punishable by up to a year in prison or a 1 million yen fine.

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