



My name is Anne Dillon and I live in Waitsfield. I am a consultant for the Burlington-based NGO, Population Media Center, and I am pleased to be here today.

I'm not sure how many people understand that we're currently in what is known as the "Sixth Great Extinction," wherein species all over our planet are vanishing at an unprecedented rate. The last great extinction was approximately 65 million years ago. All great extinctions prior to the one we're currently in were due to natural events such as an asteroid strike in the case of the dinosaurs' disappearance, or the bursts of gamma rays or volcanism, for instance.

Past extinctions have been marked by a loss of as much as 90 percent of Earth's species; this one appears to be no exception in terms of the number of species we're losing. What IS exceptional about this present extinction is its primary cause, which we can ascertain if we look in the mirror. Man is the primary driver of the sixth great extinction in which we presently find ourselves. It goes by the name of Anthropocene, or the age of the humans.

All species are suffering but amphibians are suffering greatly in particular: 41% of them are imperiled. The insect family is also in great jeopardy, with 100% of Orthoptera species—crickets, grasshoppers and katydids—threatened with extinction. The butterfly family doesn't fare much better.

The insects and the butterflies are our pollinators, and without them we face the loss of 75 percent of our food crops. When we lose the food crops, we can't eat — WE cannot survive. I talk about the importance of insects because they're part of the great web of life, which isn't an abstract, airy-fairy feel-good notion, but a very real natural construct upon which we depend for our survival as human beings. The great web of life is something that we all need to honor and respect if mankind itself is to survive as a species.

Now let's talk about the elephants, for in the same way that we're especially dependent on the pollinators for our survival, we're dependent upon the elephant as well. Because? . . . elephants are natural pollinators, who via their dung, spread seeds that grow and germinate . . . millions of

seeds. Therein the elephants are responsible for vegetating large swathes of the African continent, which, together with the Amazon rainforest, co-create the “lungs” of the world; lungs which the world needs, *in order to be able to breathe*.

According to Paula Kahumbu, Executive Director of WildlifeDirect, if the lush landscape of Africa turns to desert, it’s no longer capable of aerating the Earth, of being the lungs of the world.

As we know, all too sadly, in the 1940s it’s estimated that between three and five million elephants roamed the African continent, but their numbers began to plummet in the 1950s as global demand for their ivory grew. The CITES one-off sales to Asia, one in 1999 and the second in 2008, exacerbated the problem by sending mixed messages to potential ivory consumers and allowing illegal ivory to pass as legal product.

Today, African elephant numbers have fallen to somewhere in the neighborhood of 300,000 to 600,000 animals. Traditionally only the bulls were killed, however, poachers are now also gunning down the matriarchs, which we know to be particularly disastrous in that the elephant culture is a matriarchal one which relies on the mother’s stored memories of other relationships and of the environment to inform and protect the herd, which she oversees. Coupled with this is the fact that the young elephants, up until the age of three, rely upon their mother’s milk for survival. Sadly, not only are the matriarchs falling under the poachers’ bullets, but the young elephants, with tusks the size of a ruler, are as well.

Dr. Joyce Poole, elephant researcher and expert tells us that elephants know that humans have become the enemy. This is all too clearly revealed by their behavior. She cites one particularly telling example: In years past, whole herds of elephants would annually use a particular migration trail on the (Masai Mara) game reserve in Kenya. They would rumble down the trail in broad daylight, announcing their collective arrival with great fanfare and much joy and delight, trumpeting as only the elephants can. Now, according to Dr. Poole, they make this yearly journey at night, slinking down the trail, deathly silent, clearly frightened.

As we know, elephants are incredibly intelligent creatures with highly evolved methods of communication and the apparent ability to experience and convey very complex emotions and behaviors, including the mourning of their dead. Some people who have studied and worked with them also believe they are telepathic. This includes Dame Daphne Sheldrick, who runs the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in Kenya; she has dedicated her life to the elephants’ survival.

Lawrence Anthony was a noted conservationist who had a game reserve in Zululand, South Africa. One day in 1999 he was asked to take in a herd of rogue elephants who otherwise would be shot. He knew nothing about elephants but could not let them be put down, so he agreed to house them on his reserve. Over the years, he and the elephants became very close, indeed, he became part of their family.

Sadly, he passed away in 2012 at the young age of 61. After he died, an amazing thing happened. The elephants he had nurtured on his reserve, who by now comprised two different herds,

travelled for over twelve hours to the house he had lived in. They remained there for two days and then solemnly departed. They had not visited his home for a very long time and had no reason to do so now, unless they were paying tribute to the man who had saved them from certain death, a man who was their friend, who they trusted as one of their own.

I think we all know that at the present rate of poaching, these marvelous creatures will be gone in the wild in ten or fifteen years.

Given the gravity of this reality, we must all do what we can to preserve this iconic animal for future generations.

Antique dealers, gun makers, and those who trade in musical instruments will push back and argue for loopholes so that they can operate with impunity . . . business as usual. But there must be no more business as usual when it comes to ivory. There must be no loopholes. When ivory was made into antiques, the situation was different for the elephant. Their numbers were more plentiful and they were not threatened with extinction. This is a different day. This is a day of the earth in distress. Climate change is altering weather patterns the world over. The pollinators are dying at an alarming rate, together with our other precious species. The Earth is crying. The elephant is crying. It's "situation critical" and no one, not any of us, have the luxury of indulging in items made of ivory anymore. This day, this new day, calls for a new paradigm of conservation and preservation, of saying goodbye to our old materialistic ways that value status symbols over the sanctity of nature, upon which *all* life depends.

As noted previously, I work as a consultant for the NGO Population Media Center, an international NGO based in Burlington. We use an entertainment-education model to create social change; it's called the Sabido Method. The vehicle we employ to create this change is the soap opera, which we produce primarily in developing countries all over the world. Into any given soap opera we weave pro-social messages designed to heighten awareness about and educate the audience on any given topic. Primarily we have worked with the issues of family planning and reproductive health, but increasingly we're incorporating wildlife conservation concerns into our model.

We're presently developing a show for Chinese television designed to dissuade the Chinese consumer from buying ivory because, as we all know, China is the main driver of the egregious consumption that's driving the slaughter of the elephants.

The Chinese government has been taking token steps to slow down demand within its own country but more pressure is needed to be put on China. However, clearly, as regards ivory consumption, we cannot tell China what to do without attending to our own ivory consumption first.

Obama has thus risen to this challenge with the 2013 Executive Order to Combat Wildlife Trafficking and more recently, with The National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking as of February of last year. A statement released at the time says this: "The United States must

curtail its own role in the illegal trade in wildlife and must LEAD in addressing this issue on the global stage.”

To do this, to add fuel to the fire of the increased federal clampdown on illegal wildlife trafficking and illegal ivory consumption in the U.S., ivory sales must be outlawed in every state of our union.

It’s heartening that other states have and are stepping up to the plate to outlaw ivory sales and increase enforcement efforts. Vermont has always prided itself as being a state of firsts and as such, has been a leader of progressive social and environmental initiatives designed to make the world a better place for all. It was the first state to abolish slavery, to recognize civil unions, to ban fracking. We would not be the first state to ban ivory sales, but we would be in the forefront of this movement and that is its own reward.

I encourage you to support a total ban on ivory sales in Vermont. We cannot let the elephants go extinct on our watch. To do so would be a crime against nature and against future generations of children, whose innocence, given the current chaotic state of the world today, is being robbed from them in a myriad of ways.

The way I see things, we’re either part of the solution or part of the problem. On behalf of the elephants and on behalf of future generations, I encourage you to be part of the solution. Please be pro-active on this critically important issue by supporting a total ban on the sale of ivory in the state of Vermont.

Thank you for your time and attention today.

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