

Undocumented ivory offered for sale across Florida

Undercover investigation underscores the need for a state law
to combat trade in elephant ivory



Undocumented brooch labeled as ivory and necklace suspected to be ivory for sale in FL stores

An undercover investigation in February 2023 by the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International found hundreds of items likely made from elephant ivory—in the form of carved elephant tusks, figurines, trinkets and jewelry—for sale across the state of Florida. The state has no law prohibiting intrastate trade in wildlife products such as ivory.

An HSUS/HSI investigator and wildlife biologist found ivory products for sale at 20 Florida shops from Tampa to Jacksonville, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach and points in between.

Main findings:

- Out of the 46 stores visited, 20 had ivory for sale.
- Of the 20 cities visited, 13 cities had stores that were selling ivory.
- 352 pieces of suspected ivory were identified by the investigator.

Among the items for sale were:

- Carved elephant tusk.
- Ivory beads.

- Ivory earrings.
- Ivory bracelets.
- Ivory perfume bottles.
- Ivory cigarette holder.
- Various ivory figurines.
- Netsuke figurines.
- Ivory chess set.
- Ivory cutlery.

Only two vendors out of the 20 locations claimed to have the correct paperwork to sell ivory; neither presented documentation during the potential sale. At some stores, some of the ivory was labeled with misleading or false information. Without proper documentation, it is impossible to know whether items were imported in violation of federal law.

Cities with stores where ivory was found:

- Brandon
- Clearwater
- Dania Beach
- Fort Lauderdale
- Jacksonville
- Lakeland

- Largo
- Lauderdale-by-the-Sea
- Saint Petersburg
- Ocala
- Tampa
- West Palm Beach
- Winter Park

Many sellers claimed either to not know about relevant law or if they needed documentation in order to sell ivory. Others were aware that the sale of most ivory is illegal under federal law and advised the investigator to place purchased items in checked baggage when traveling and tell the Transportation Security Administration that it is bone.

Under federal law, new ivory cannot be imported, exported or sold across state lines. Antique ivory can be sold with documentation, and the burden of proof is on the seller. Without required documentation proving that the item is an antique at least 100 years old, ivory items for sale in Florida are potentially new ivory sourced from recently poached elephants. Federal law does not address sales within a state, which is why state laws are needed to close the loophole in local markets.

Thirteen states and Washington, D.C., have in recent years enacted laws to ban the intrastate sale of ivory.

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, multibillion-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 due to the ease of mixing the two. Enforcement efforts are often hampered by a lack of resources or the difficulty of visually distinguishing illegal ivory from legally acquired ivory.

Each year, as many as [15,000 elephants](#) are killed in Africa to supply the demand for ivory. [A recent report](#) 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.



Figurine labeled as ivory for sale in FL



Carved figurines, napkin holders, and other décor carved from suspected ivory for sale in FL