

Model Doutzen Kroes shares her impassioned plea to save elephants from the ivory trade and describes how the fashion industry is making strides to protect this great beast

As told to CATERINA MINTHE



# Elephant HEART

“THE FIRST TIME I SAW ELEPHANTS IN THE WILD was at the Samburu National Reserve, at the Elephant Watch Camp in Kenya, with my family. I was completely mesmerized – it was also the first time my two children were speechless for hours! Both the animals’ sheer size and how the adults and calves interacted so similarly to us – it was hard not to see our behavior reflected in theirs – captivated me. They made me feel such a strong sense of compassion for what they are up against; my heart broke when I learned of their plight for survival. Though I didn’t set out to become an ambassador for elephant conservation, after the safari, I desperately wanted to help secure their future

and bring awareness to the deadly impact of the ivory crisis.

The number-one threat to elephants is the ivory trade, which kills up to 30 000 elephants per year. If we don’t intervene, at this rate, the African elephant could be gone from the wild within our generation. Human-elephant conflict is another serious threat to these giant mammals as our populations and development continue

to grow and expand further into rural lands. When elephants can no longer use their inherited migratory paths to lead their family to food and water because the trails have been blocked, this can cause life-threatening situations for the animals. In order to find food, they often start crop raiding, and sometimes, elephants are shot as a result.

Elephants are our most noble animal, and are the largest land mammal left on the planet. Losing elephants will have a far greater impact on our ecosystems than just the loss of a single species. They distribute plant and tree seeds through their dung, so thriving elephant populations spread a greater diversity of trees and plants, which, in turn, creates better ecosystems for all. Many other species live alongside the elephants as well, including microspecies that inhabit their footprints. They also create watering holes, which other animals benefit from.

Ivory is considered a luxury item, and so Knot On My Planet (KOMP) co-founders David Bonnouvrier, Trish Goff, and I – its global ambassador – believe the luxury industry should have a role in saving elephants from the ivory trade. Our aim is to help provide a secure future for elephants by forging partnerships with fashion and luxury brands. We have united with the Elephant Crisis Fund (ECF) because we believe it to be the most effective and accountable organization supporting the best ideas to end the ivory crisis, as opposed to just a single institution. What I admire about the work of the ECF, is that it not only fosters collaboration, but delivers rapid impact on the ground, with 100% of every dollar raised going directly to the field.

Our most recent collaboration is the launch of the new Tiffany Save The Wild collection, designed by Reed Krakoff, which is our second collaboration with Tiffany & Co. in the past two years. It features the sweetest elephant charms and a stunning 18ct white gold diamond-studded brooch, among other pieces. Just like the first collection, 100% of proceeds are donated to the ECF. Tiffany & Co. has pledged US \$4 million until 2020 to the ECF in support of KOMP. It has counted on Naomi Campbell, Zoë Kravitz, Elle Fanning, Lara Stone, and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley to help spread awareness. This past summer, we collaborated with Loewe through the design of a limited-edition elephant handbag, which Karlie Kloss, Adriana Lima, Christy Turlington, and Edie Campbell have all helped support. Last spring, we united with retailer Holt Renfrew in Toronto and a percentage of in-store sales and 100% of limited-edition T-shirts were donated to the ECF.

With these funds, the ECF supports 230 projects with 70 organizations in 33 countries throughout Africa and ivory-consuming nations. It is instrumental in putting ‘boots on the ground’ and ‘eyes in the sky’ to thwart poachers. The work involves accelerated investment in emergency responses, intelligence-led anti-poaching patrols, and new approaches to satellite tracking of elephant movements for greater security. It cuts off the criminal syndicates behind the ivory trade by supporting trusted law enforcement units across Africa to find, arrest,

and prosecute traffickers; helps local partners develop courtroom monitoring programs; and supports cross-border intelligence sharing and operations. It also invests in projects that work to reduce the demand for ivory, which, of course, fuels the killing of elephants. Additionally, it is curtailing its availability by working with national governments to end the ivory trade.

Along with financial support, spreading awareness is key. From posting on your own social media channels to having conversations with friends, the more people who talk about the threats to elephants and why it is important to save them, the better chance we have at securing their future.

Travel to Africa is always an incredible part of being involved in KOMP. Equally important has been making new friends and connecting with old ones around it. One special memory I have is when we went with Tiffany & Co. to Kenya in May and I got to see the elephants through the eyes of my peers – like model and fellow ambassador Jordan Barrett and model Dilone – who were seeing them in the wild for the first time. To see them grinning from ear to ear with their eyes wide open, completely awestruck by the animals, was just spectacular. It was one of the most memorable trips in my life so far.

Although there is still so much work to be done, we are seeing positive outcomes in 10 of the 20 regions in Africa where our partners work. Notably, China has closed its ivory market, Hong Kong’s is projected to close by 2021, and Taiwan will begin the process in 2020. These are huge strides that we hope will put pressure on Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Japan to follow suit. When the demand for ivory stops, the killing will too.” □



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