

Hello, and welcome to “As It Is,” our daily magazine show for people learning American English.

I’m Christopher Cruise in Washington.

Today, we hear about how researchers are using technology to protect African elephants from hunters.

“There’s some connection between human and elephants that would be a really sad thing to lose.”

But first, we go to Zimbabwe, where some women are considering an unusual effort designed to persuade men to vote.

No Sex Until You Register to Vote

Zimbabwe is set to hold presidential elections July 31st. Historically, Zimbabwean men vote in far fewer numbers than the country’s women. But, a female government minister has proposed steps she hopes could change those numbers.

Jeri Watson reports...

Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga is Zimbabwe's Minister of Regional Integration and International Cooperation. She is leading a campaign to get men to vote in the elections this month. She has asked Zimbabwean women to deny their husbands or partners sex until they register to vote.

"You are basically saying to your partner, we all are suffering the same thing. We need to make a difference. I'm not asking you to go to war. All I'm asking you is to go and vote. You have a responsibility. And for years we have seen that the majority of people that go and register to vote have been women. And this call is about saying we as women can't be taking this struggle alone. We need to bring our men on board. And if we can't bring them nicely by persuading them, we will deny them something that we know they desperately would want."

The minister is a member of the Movement for Democratic Change. Two members of that party are among the candidates seeking the presidency. They are Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai and Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube. President Robert Mugabe, of the ZANU-PF party, is seeking re-election. He has served in the office since 1980.

Currently, voter registration efforts are continuing. Minister Misihairabwi-Mushonga thinks men will vote in the elections if they are starved for sex.

"Sex strike is not a new concept. It has been used to stop wars. It has been used to ask for developmental things in the areas and has been very successful. So this is not a revolutionary concept that I'm coming up with. It is a concept that has been used the world over."

Soon, the world will learn if the “sex strike” idea can get Zimbabwean men to voting stations.

I’m Jeri Watson.

Using Technology to Protect African Elephants from Poachers

Researchers are warning that African elephants could disappear forever in this century if hunters continue killing them for ivory at current rates.

Jim Tedder tells us about a new effort to provide information that could help in efforts to stop the unlawful hunting, called poaching.

The grasslands of Africa might not exist without elephants. They knock down so many trees that forests turn into flat, open spaces. Many birds and other animals feed on the grass. Elephants help shape the land. Without them, everything would change. And for many, that would make the world a poorer place.

“There’s some connection between humans and elephants that would be a really sad thing to lose.”

Kevin Uno of Columbia University is a researcher. He is concerned about the possible disappearance of elephants. There are only about 400,000 of the animals left in the wild. Thirty thousand are killed each year for their ivory tusks.

“So what that means is, in a span of 15 to 20 years, we could lose our elephants.”

Elephant ivory is highly sought for carving material, especially in China and Japan.

Trade in ivory was made illegal in 1989 under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. However, ivory that was harvested before the ban is still legal to buy and sell. This adds to the complexity of anti-poaching efforts. How do investigators tell the old, legal ivory from the new?

An international team of scientists say the answer can be found with a new test. It measures the level of radioactive carbon in a piece of ivory.

Atmospheric radiocarbon has been especially high since the 1950s, when the United States and the then Soviet Union tested nuclear weapons. The radioactive element has been degrading, falling to lower levels, ever since. So the scientists carry out a test to find the level of radiocarbon in a tusk. Then they compare it to levels in the atmosphere over the years. This tells them when the tested tusk grew -- and when the elephant was killed.

“We were just shocked to see that you could actually determine the age to within about one year.”

The findings were published in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. The researchers hope the test will help investigators identify what ivory is legal to sell and what ivory has been poached.

But, Kevin Uno says enforcing the trade ban is only part of the battle to save elephants.

“We’ve developed this tool that fills an important gap in our ability to help with the poaching problem, but it’s not the only answer, and ending the demand for ivory is, is really the most important component of addressing this problem.”

The researcher is pushing for efforts to educate ivory buyers.

“What we need to send is a very strong and clear message that when you buy something that’s made of ivory, there’s an elephant who dies for that.”

I’m Jim Tedder.

And that’s *As It Is*.

We hope you enjoyed our program today.



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I’m Christopher Cruise, and that’s “As It Is” on The Voice of America.



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