



Biologists
WITHOUT BORDERS

2020 Online Ivory Listed for Sale in the United States



Photo credit: Shannon Wild



Introduction

This report is a summary of our third-year searches for online vendors and auction sites listing ivory items for sale. As with the first two summary reports (BWB 2018; BWB 2019), the purpose was to identify sellers and to assess the current scope and locations of the online ivory trade.

All our reports and intel have been submitted to State and Federal wildlife agencies, which have already resulted in six successful prosecutions. In addition, we are collaborating with the National Whistleblowers Center and the Department of Homeland Security, which are also pursuing prosecutions and studying our data.

Survey Methods

We again limited our internet searches for ivory items to those offered by US-based sellers and auction sites (vendors). Searches were conducted daily between January 1 to December 31, 2020 and divided into six search periods for analysis. We used keywords (i.e., ivory, tusk) to search for target items being advertised or sold by a range of online vendors, including independent vendors (auction and non-auction) and large auction and non-auction sites. We also utilized the automated keyword search feature at three prominent auction platforms (AuctionZip, Invaluable, Liveauctioneers). This provided email alerts when items matched our keywords, which allowed for thorough and continuous coverage.

Our surveys methods (i.e., search protocols and criteria, data collection and analysis) were the same used in prior years and detailed in our 2018 report (BWB 2018). We also compared the results of our 2018 and 2019 findings to the 2020 data wherever possible.

Results

Our year-long internet search yielded over 990 ivory items offered by 112 vendors based in 33 US states. The highest number of vendors selling ivory were found in Florida (21), New York (11), Pennsylvania (8), and California (8) (Figures 1 and 2). Only 28% of the vendors had actual brick and mortar stores (physical stores). The highest number of items for sale were found in Florida, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Missouri, Arizona, Ohio, and Massachusetts respectively (≥ 50 items) (Figures 1 and 3). Carved ivory figures were the most common items encountered across all states.

Online vendors again varied in size from large-worldwide operations to small independent sellers. Aggregator auction websites, which offer multiple sellers an online platform to access a much greater audience, represented over 90% of the online market. The top three aggregator websites were AuctionZip, Invaluable, and Liveauctioneers. Vendors often listed items on multiple aggregate auction sites. Table 1 presents the online vendor and auction sites that had the highest number of items for sale or the greatest number of listings over the 12-month survey.

Number of newly found vendors selling ivory in 2020 decreased by 13 percent from the previous year (Figure 4). The number of new items also appears to have decreased by at least 10 percent from the previous year. Most of the vendors referred to their advertised items as being “antique,” or “vintage,” “from 1900 century”, or “pre-ban” but none provided documentation of legal import. The states without ivory bans often stated the items could not be sold out-of-state.

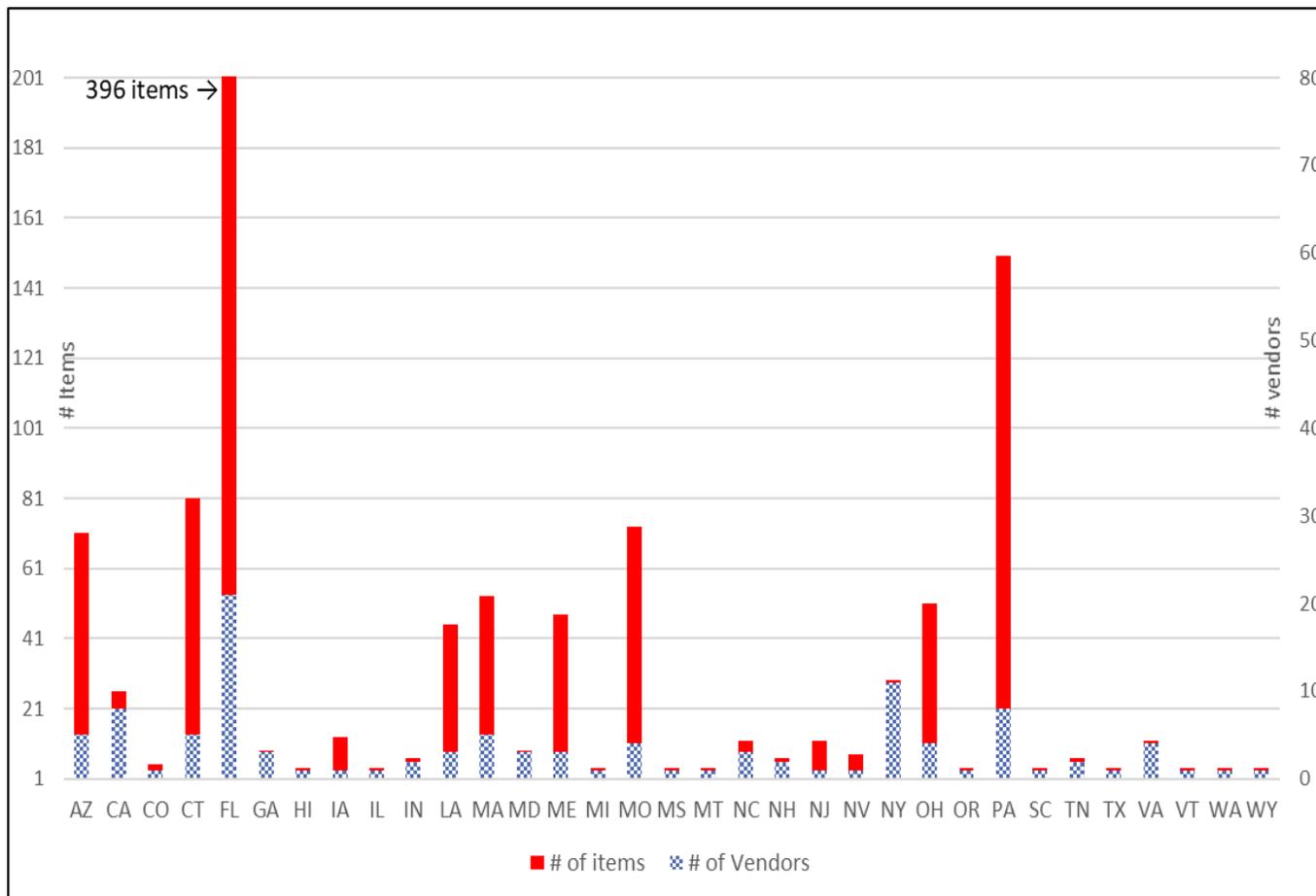


Figure 1. Online ivory for sale by state: number of vendors and items (January 1 to December 31, 2020).

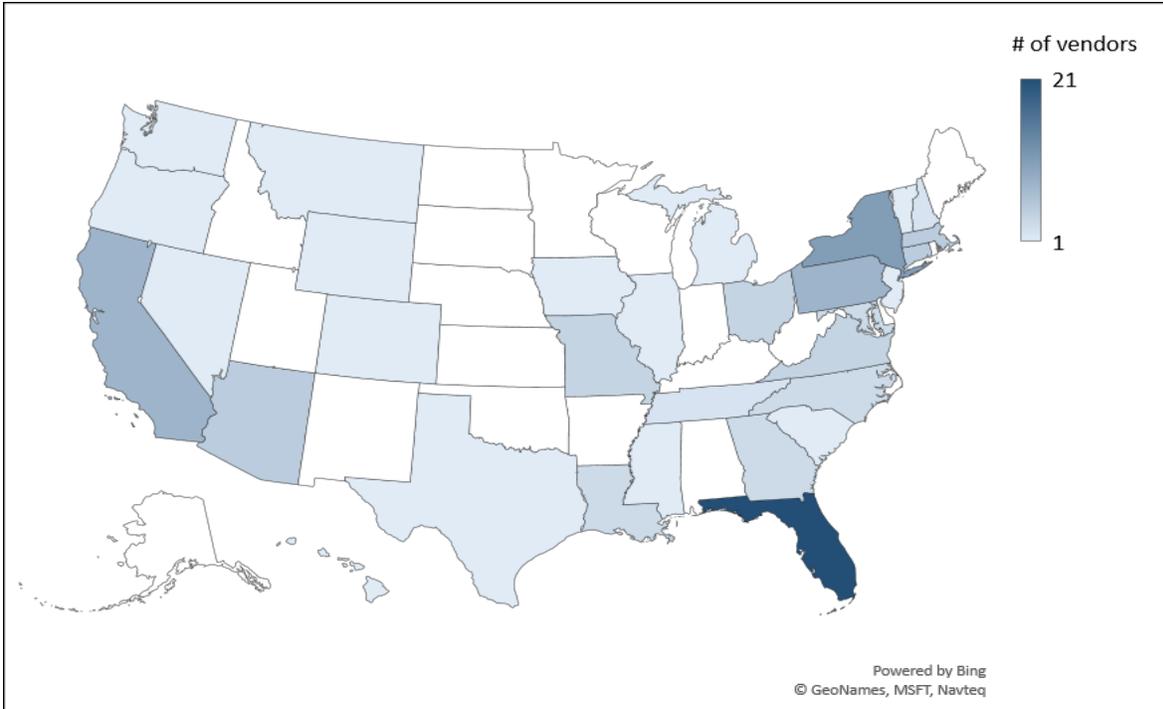


Figure 2. Number of online vendors selling ivory by state (January 1 to December 31, 2020).

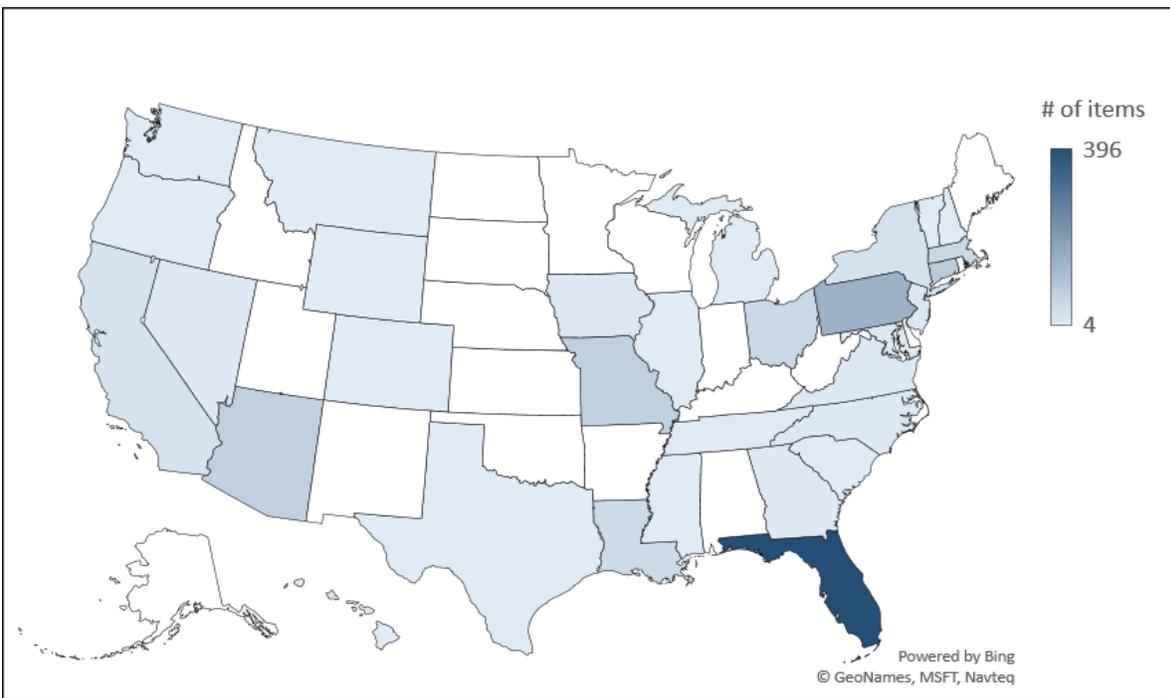


Figure 3. Number of online ivory items for sale by state (January 1 to December 31, 2020).

Table 1. Top Fourteen Vendors/Auctions Selling Ivory – 2020¹

Store Name	Location	# items	# listings	Auction/Store
Morphy's Auctions	Denver, PA	119	5	Auction
Affiliated Auctions	Tallahassee, FL	81	6	Auction
Winter Auctions	Plainville, CT	68	5	Auction
Seminole Estate Auctions	Orange City, FL	66	5	Auction
Link Auctions	St. Louis, MO	52	1	Auction
Blackwell Auctions	Clearwater, FL	52	5	Auction
Bradford's Auctions	Sun City, AZ	41	5	Auction
Kodner Auctions	Dania Beach, FL	40	2	Auction
David's Antiques	New Orleans, LA	36	1	Auction
Joshua Kodner	Dania Beach, FL	35	1	Auction/Store
Thomaston Place	Thomaston, ME	31	2	Auction/Store
Eldred's Auctions	East Dennis, MA	30	5	Auction/Store
Apple Tree Auctions	Newark, OH	20	5	Auction/Store
Auctions by Daum	Hobe Sound, FL	17	5	Auction

¹= Selection Criteria: ≥ 30 items or ≥ 5 listings. Listings are number of search periods the store/auction had a listing (6 search periods).

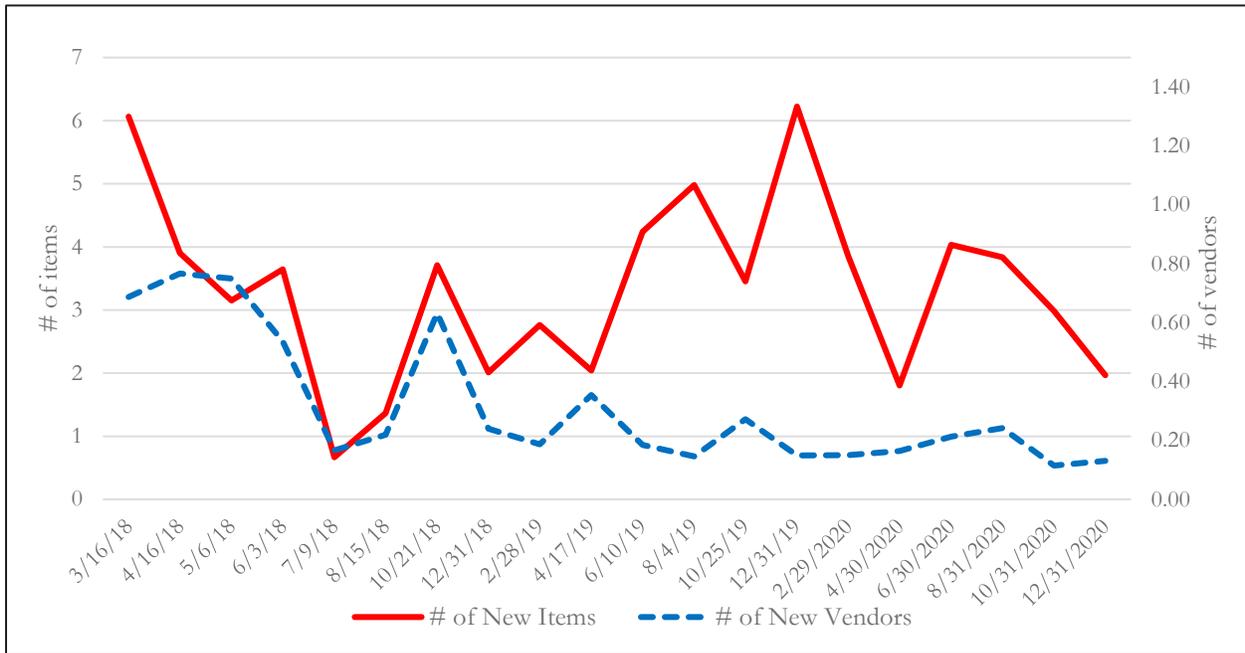


Figure 4. Number of new online vendors and new ivory items by search period (March 1, 2018 to December 31, 2020) (items were divided by number of search days in each period).

Discussion

Our data show that the US ivory markets continue to flourish on the internet. Our surveys indicate that Florida and Pennsylvania continue to be the top sellers of ivory. For the last three survey years, Florida ranked first in number of vendors and ranked one or two in number of ivory items. Pennsylvania has ranked high in both number of vendors and items for the last two years. New top sellers in 2020 include Connecticut and Missouri.

Despite a state ban on ivory, California continues to rank high in number of vendors. New York, which has had the longest state ban on selling ivory, is also ranked high in the number of vendors.

The number of new vendors appears to have again decreased over previous years, likely due to our approaching a saturation point in identifying new vendors. The decrease in number of items offered in the third survey year may be due in part to transportation restrictions in and out of Asia imposed to combat the pandemic (WJW 2020).

Four sellers were among our top sellers in all three survey years: Blackwell Auctions (FL), Morphy's Auctions (PA), Eldred's (MA), and Kodner Auctions (FL). Two of the top sellers for all three survey years (Kodner and Eldred's), were also among the top sellers in a 2014 study (IFAW 2014). Seminole Estate Auctions (FL) has been a top seller for the last two years.

As with the previous years, our findings make it clear that there is still a significant online market for ivory. However, if state bans could be enacted in Florida and Pennsylvania, it would likely significantly reduce the ivory trade in the US. In addition, if the large aggregator sites were encouraged to ban the selling of ivory, it would severely limit the US online market, principally AuctionZip, Invaluable, and Liveauctioneers.

Citations

BWB (Biologists without Borders). 2018. 2018 Online Ivory Listed for Sale in the United States. Biologists without Borders. [\(2018 Report\)](#).

BWB (Biologists without Borders). 2019. 2019 Online Ivory Listed for Sale in the United States. Biologists without Borders. [\(2019 Report\)](#).

IFAW (International Fund for Animal Welfare). 2014. Bidding Against Survival: The Elephant Poaching Crisis and the Role of Auctions in the U.S. Ivory Market.

Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC). 2020. Rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on wildlife trafficking.