



Biologists
WITHOUT BORDERS

2019 Online Ivory Listed for Sale in the United States



Photo credit: Shannon Wild



Introduction

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

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

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, 2019 and divided into six search periods. We used keywords (i.e., ivory) 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 four prominent auction platforms (Liveauctioneers, AuctionZip, Invaluable, Bidsquare). This provided email alerts when items matched our keywords, which allowed for continuous coverage.

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

Results

Our year-long internet search yielded over 2000 ivory items offered by 104 vendors based in 29 US states. The highest number of vendors selling ivory were found in Florida (19), Pennsylvania (10), California (8), Virginia (6), Massachusetts (6), and Ohio (5) (Figures 1 and 2). Only 41% of the vendor/auction sites (vendors) had actual brick and mortar stores (physical stores). The highest number of items for sale were found in Hawaii, Florida, Ohio, Massachusetts, California, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Maine, and Arizona respectively (≥ 30 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 sellers. Aggregator auction websites which offer multiple sellers an online platform to access a much greater audience, represented almost 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.

Over the two years of data collection, the number of newly found vendors selling ivory appears to have decreased while the number of items found increased (Figure 4). 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.

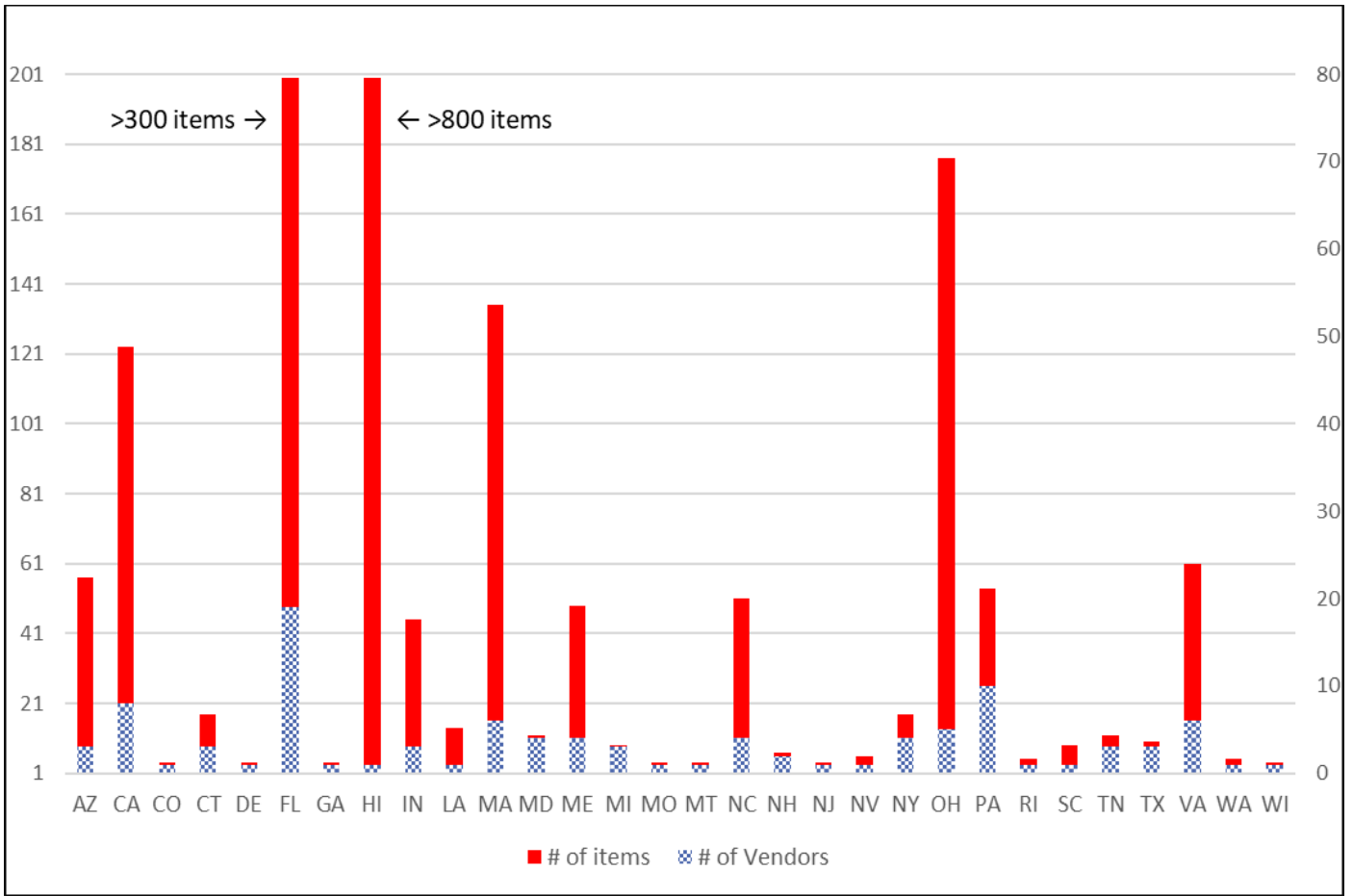


Figure 1. Online ivory for sale by state: number of vendors and items (January 1 to December 31, 2019).

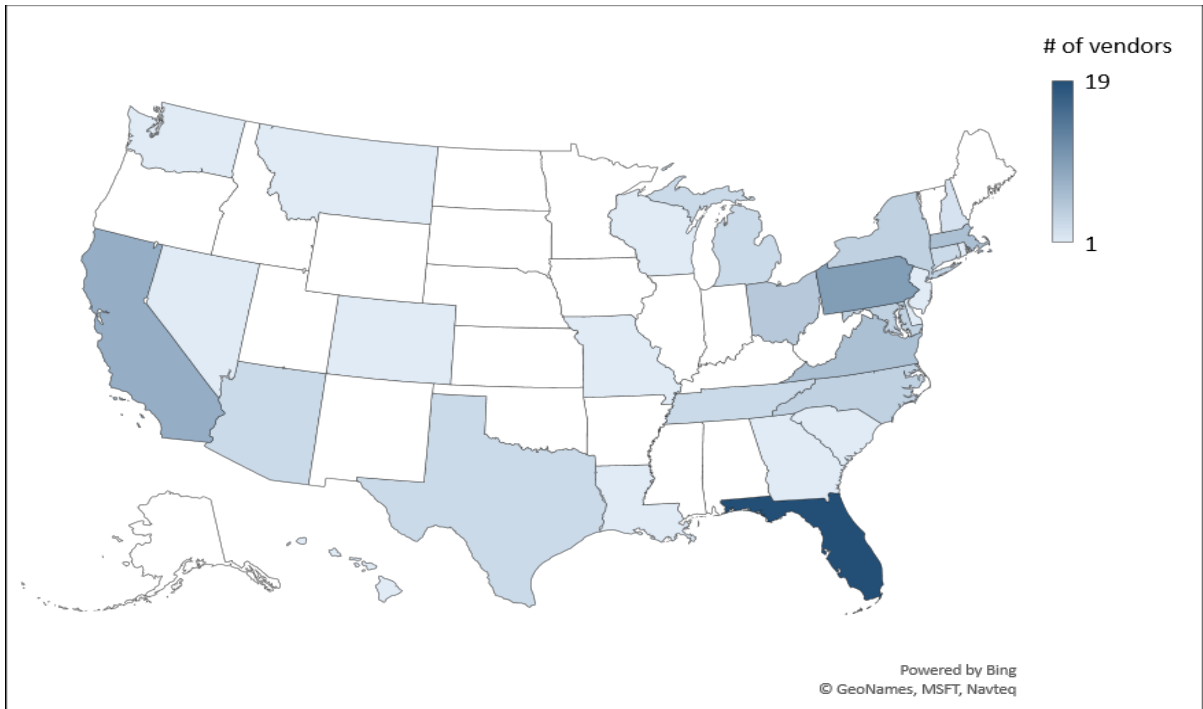


Figure 2. Number of online vendors selling ivory by state (January 1 to December 31, 2019).

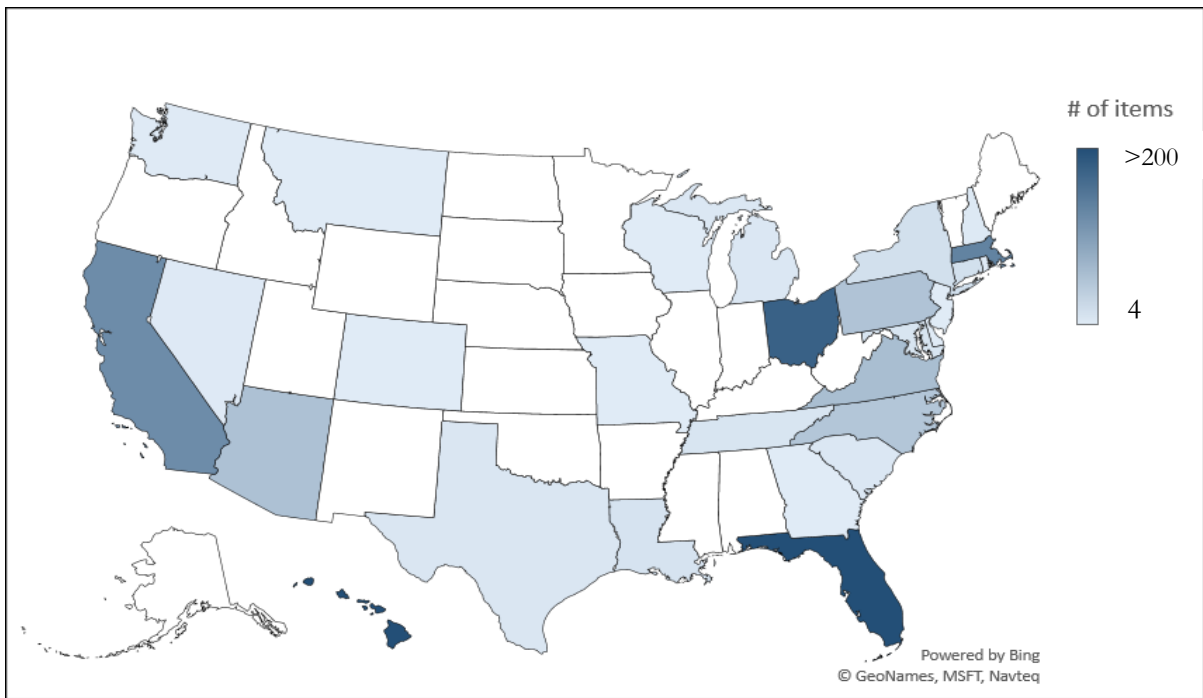


Figure 3. Number of online ivory items for sale by state (January 1 to December 31, 2019).

Table 1. Top Thirteen Vendors/Auctions Selling Ivory¹.

Store Name	Location	# items	# listings	Auction/Store
Jewelry Kingdom	Honolulu, HI	>800	1 ²	Store/Website
Eldred's	East Dennis, MA	108	7	Auction
Seminole Estate Auctions	Orange, FL	103	4	Auction
Blackwell Auctions	Clearwater, FL	102	6	Auction
Kodner Auctions	Dania Beach, FL	85	6	Auction
Mercari	Palo Alto, CA	103	1 ²	Website
David Warther Carvings	Sugarcreek, OH	60	1 ²	Store/Website
Rachel Davis Fine Arts	Cleveland, OH	56	1	Auction
Apple Tree Auctions	Newark, OH	50	4	Auction
Thomaston Place	Thomaston, ME	45	4	Auction
Ripley's Auction	Indianapolis, IN	37	3	Auction
Morphy's Auctions	Denver, PA	29	3	Auction
Auctions by Daum	Hobe Sound, FL	25	6	Auction

¹ = Selection Criteria: ≥ 25 items or ≥ 5 listings. Listings are number of search periods the store/auction had a listing.

² = only surveyed once.

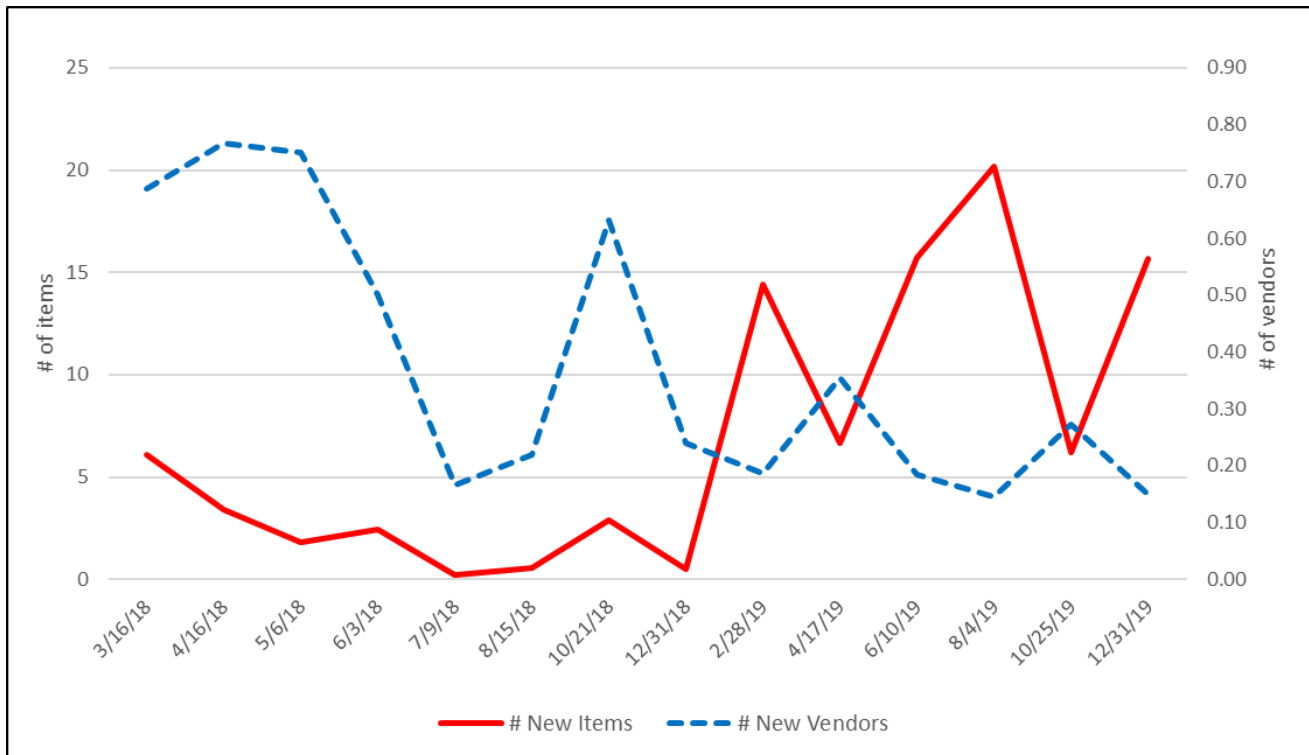


Figure 4. Number of new online vendors and new ivory items by search period (March 1, 2018 to December 31, 2019).

Discussion

US ivory markets continue to flourish on the internet. Our survey indicates that Florida, Hawaii, Massachusetts, California, and Pennsylvania continue to be the top sellers of ivory. Florida ranked number one in online sellers and number two in number of ivory items. New top sellers in 2019 include Ohio, Virginia, Maine and Arizona.

Despite state bans on ivory, Hawaii and California still are among the top sellers. New York, which has had the longest state ban on selling ivory, is no longer a top seller with substantial reductions from 2018.

Five sellers were among our top sellers in both years (2018, 2019): Jewelry Kingdom (HI), Blackwell Auctions (FL), Eldred's (MA), Kodner Auctions (FL), and Morphy's Auctions (PA). Two of the top sellers in our 2019 study (Kodner and Eldred's), were also among the top sellers in a 2014 study (IFAW 2014).

The number of new sellers in 2019 appears to have decreased from the previous year, which may be due to our approaching a saturation point in identifying new vendors. The substantial increase in number of items offered in the second year appears to be primarily due to two new sellers offering large amounts of items (David Warther Carvings, OH and Mercari, CA). Both these stores are non-auction websites that have been in existence for years but have just become known to us.

As with the previous year, our findings make it clear that there is still a significant online market for ivory. However, if state bans could be enacted in Florida, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Ohio, it would likely further reduce the ivory trade in the US. In addition, if the large aggregator sites were shutdown it would severely limit the US online market, principally Liveauctioneers, AuctionZip and Invaluable.

Citations

BWB (Biologists without Borders). 2018. 2018 Online Ivory Listed for Sale in the United States. Biologists without Borders (available on our website under saving elephants).

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.