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# 'The Ivory Game': Telluride Review

6:00 PM PDT 9/2/2016 by Stephen Farber



**THE BOTTOM LINE**

*Remember the elephants!*

OPENS

11/4/2016



Leonardo DiCaprio and Paul Allen helped to produce this stirring documentary about the threat to the survival of African elephants.

In addition to his day job as Oscar-winning actor, Leonardo DiCaprio is well known for his commitment to environmental causes, and he helped to produce a compelling documentary, *The Ivory Game*, which has its world premiere at Telluride. The eye-opening film from directors Richard Ladkani and Kief Davidson exposes the threat to African elephants from poachers who want to sell the ivory to dealers in China. The film benefits from an engaging cast of characters and from striking photography of Tanzania, Zambia, and Kenya. Netflix will release the film in November, and it should stir potent audience responses.

An opening title informs us of the danger to the elephant population of Africa, which has been decimated in recent years. A few rangers have been trying to stop the killing and track down the chief poachers. These rangers turn out to be eloquent advocates for the animals they want to protect. Some have even given their lives to fight the marauders.

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The film moves from game preserves in Africa to the crowded streets of Beijing, where we meet an investigative journalist who is trying to prod the Chinese government into cracking down on ivory traders. But the greed of these dealers will be hard to conquer, considering that some of the carved ivory art objects sell for more than \$300,000 apiece.

What is admirable about the film is that it recognizes the complexity of the issues. In Africa the elephants destroy farmers' crops, so these farmers have sometimes gone into partnership with the poachers. The rangers recognize that a solution will have to involve building fences to protect the crops while also cracking down on killers and traders who lust after ivory. The film almost has the structure of a thriller, as it builds to the capture of the head honcho among ivory poachers, a man named Shetani, whose underlings are estimated to have killed 10,000 elephants.



tight direction and handsome photography by Ladkani. The haunting musical score by H. Scott Salinas also adds to the movie's impact. Sweeping, thoughtful, and often wrenching, this elegy for one of the world's most majestic animals deserves the attention that it is sure to receive.

*Production: Terra Mater Factual Studios, Vulcan Productions*

*Directors: Richard Ladkani, Kief Davidson*

*Producers: Wolfgang Knopfler, Walter Kohler, Kief Davidson*

*Executive producers: Joanne Reay, Dinah Czezik-Muller, Paul G. Allen, Carole Tomko, Adam Del Deo, Lisa Nishimura, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Davisson*

*Director of photography: Richard Ladkani*

*Editor: Verena Schoenauer*

*Music: H. Scott Salinas*

*No rating, 112 minutes*

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