Commercially extinct? That means that, if the killing of African elephants doesn’t stop now, in five years, there won’t be enough elephants left in the world to kill to supply the ivory trade. In the next ten years, on the eve of the twenty-first century, the African elephant could disappear from the face of the earth—forever.

The memory of the world’s largest, most magnificent land mammal will live on, however—in women’s jewelry boxes and in the display cabinets of art collectors.

Although only an estimated four hundred thousand elephants remain—down from 1.3 million nine years ago—as many as three hundred elephants are slaughtered every day in Africa. They are killed for their ivory tusks, which are traded on the international market, and worked into bracelets, earrings, and statues for consumers in the United States, Europe, and beyond.

“At the present rate [of killing], the African elephant will be commercially extinct in five years.”

increasing rarity of the ivory product. In a number of countries, corrupt military and government officials have been implicated in the illegal trade. It is now impossible to ensure that tusks marked as having been legally obtained were indeed taken under the quota system. It is even harder to determine the true origin of worked ivory. More than 90 percent of the ivory entering the United States comes in as jewelry and carvings from Hong Kong. Importers in Asia buy raw ivory from Africa, often with no regard to where it came from or how it was obtained.

Scientists in the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources estimate that, in 1986, the first year of the quota system, 78 percent of all ivory marketed worldwide was poached ivory traded completely outside the CITES system.

The ivory traded in that year represented the tusks of approximately 89,000 elephants. To this day, the vast extermination continues unabated.

CONSUMERS ARE TO BLAME

Who is really to blame for the elephants' destruction? Is it the African villager who is paid to kill an elephant? Is it the wealthy Asian trader who imports raw ivory into Hong Kong and exports carved trinkets to Japan and the West?

The guiltiest party is, in fact, the consumer at the end of the line. When people stop buying ivory, there will be no market for it, and the killing of elephants for their ivory will stop.

People can live without ivory. Elephants can't.

WHAT THE HSUS IS DOING

The HSUS has spearheaded...
several approaches to the elephant problem. First, we filed a formal petition with the United States Department of the Interior in February to reclassify the African elephant from its current listing as a threatened species to that of an endangered species. Already, the government has accepted the petition and has launched a full status review of the African elephant.

Americans now have until mid-August to let their government know whether they want to save the African elephant. Reclassification to endangered status would mean an immediate end to all commercial trade in ivory and elephant products in the United States.

Also, at the urging of The HSUS, the United States government joined the governments of Tanzania, Kenya, and five other nations in proposing that the African elephant be listed on Appendix I of CITES. The species is currently listed on Appendix II, which means that trade in products made from the species is regulated. An Appendix I listing would mean that the species is in danger of extinction, and all commercial trade would be banned.

The Appendix I proposal will be considered in October at the biennial meeting of the Conference of the Parties of CITES. The ultimate fate of the African elephant will then be in the hands of the 102 CITES nations.

The HSUS, however, recognizes that the African elephant cannot wait months or years for more protective laws and regulations to be adopted and enforced. Through a massive publicity and education campaign, the HSUS is asking every American to boycott all ivory products now.

To that end, The HSUS is placing print and radio public-service announcements directed at the general public, and buying magazine ads directed at art collectors and ivory jewelry merchandisers. In addition, we have purchased displays in strategic areas of New York’s John F. Kennedy Airport in an attempt to reach world travelers. The ivory trade must be destroyed or the elephants will be destroyed.

How could we live in the world without elephants? Imagine it. Would you want to live in such a world?