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Contact: Leslie Wolf Branscomb at  
[lawolf@sandiego.gov](mailto:lawolf@sandiego.gov) or (619) 533-5896

## **Ivory Dealer Forced to Forfeit Large Illegal Collection**

*Defendant Must do Volunteer Work for Animal Conservation*

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that a San Diego man who was selling ivory carvings in violation of the law must surrender his entire collection, which he was selling from his Carmel Valley garage to buyers recruited online.

Stephen Shu Wang, 54, was ordered by the Court on January 24 to give up all of the 200 or so ivory artifacts and art pieces that were confiscated from his home by state Fish & Wildlife agents in 2020. The collection included chess sets, portions of elephant tusks, a room divider screen with panels made from ivory, carvings of the “eight immortals” of Chinese mythology, a statue of a geisha, and a variety of *netsuke* -- miniature Japanese sculptures. (See attached photos.)

Estimating the value of the items is difficult, since there is no legal market for their sale or purchase, but altogether they would likely fetch more than \$100,000 on the black market.

Purchasing, trading, selling, or possessing the ivory of elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, and other creatures has long been prohibited by state, federal, and international law.

“The illegal and immoral ivory trade only serves to encourage the senseless slaughter of elephants and other endangered species,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. “In partnership with the Department of Fish & Wildlife, we will continue to pursue and prosecute anyone who traffics in these black-market goods.”

“City Attorney Elliott is once again proving herself a steadfast partner of wildlife officers seeking to end wildlife trafficking in San Diego,” said David Bess, California Department of Fish & Wildlife Deputy Director and Chief of the Law Enforcement Division. “The cases prosecuted in San Diego are sending a strong message that ivory trafficking will not be tolerated.”

Wang was charged with 15 misdemeanors: one count of possession of a prohibited animal part for personal gain, seven counts of purchasing and selling ivory in violation of the state Fish & Game code; and seven counts of importing, possessing, or selling prohibited animal parts. Two types of ivory products are exempted from the ban: musical instruments made of less than 20 percent ivory and manufactured before 1976, and antiques made of less than 5 percent ivory that are more than 100 years old. Neither exception applied to the items seized in this case.

Wang faced a maximum penalty of eight years in prison, and fines between \$40,000 and \$320,000. The defense argued for diversion instead, which the court granted, over the objections of the City Attorney’s Office.

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**1200 Third Avenue, Suite 1620, San Diego, California 92101-4188 (619) 236-6220**

Under a new California law that went into effect in 2021, defendants in most misdemeanor cases may seek court-ordered diversion, thereby avoiding more serious penalties as long as they remain law-abiding and follow other conditions ordered by the court. If those conditions are met, the case may be later dismissed, without the defendant having the potential burden of a criminal conviction on their record.

In addition to having to surrender his collection of ivory pieces, the judge ordered Wang to remain law abiding for a year, and to complete 100 hours of volunteer work with a nonprofit organization involved in animal conservation. Wang also agreed to a Fourth Amendment waiver, which means authorities may search his home or other premises controlled by him without a warrant to ensure he remains in compliance. If Wang fails to comply with the conditions set forth by the court, the prosecution of his case will resume.

Wang's activities came to light because he was advertising ivory items for sale online. Undercover Fish & Wildlife agents contacted him, and one met Wang on two occasions, posing as a buyer. Once they agreed on the sale of more than two dozen items for the price of \$6,500 Fish & Wildlife officers descended on the property to serve a search warrant, finding an estimated 200 items in the house and garage. Authorities determined that most of the objects in Wang's collection were made of elephant tusks, but a few may have been made from walrus or hippopotamus, which is also illegal.

This case was prosecuted by Deputy City Attorney Jordan DuBois of the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit on behalf of the People of the State of California.

The Nuisance Abatement Unit was established in 1984 and aggressively enforces public nuisance, land use, and environmental laws in the City of San Diego. The unit works with numerous city, county, and state agencies to address nuisance properties and blight throughout San Diego; illegal transportation, storage, and disposal of hazardous waste; leaking underground storage tanks; oil spills; lead paint violations; the destruction of historical and archeological resources; illegal grading and dumping; and the destruction of environmentally sensitive land. The unit also works with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to protect the marine environment from fishing in protected areas and to protect endangered species from wildlife trafficking, such as the illegal sale of ivory.

Citizens may report illegal ivory sales, and health and safety and environmental violations to the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit at 619-533-5655 or [CityAttorney@saniego.gov](mailto:CityAttorney@saniego.gov)

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