

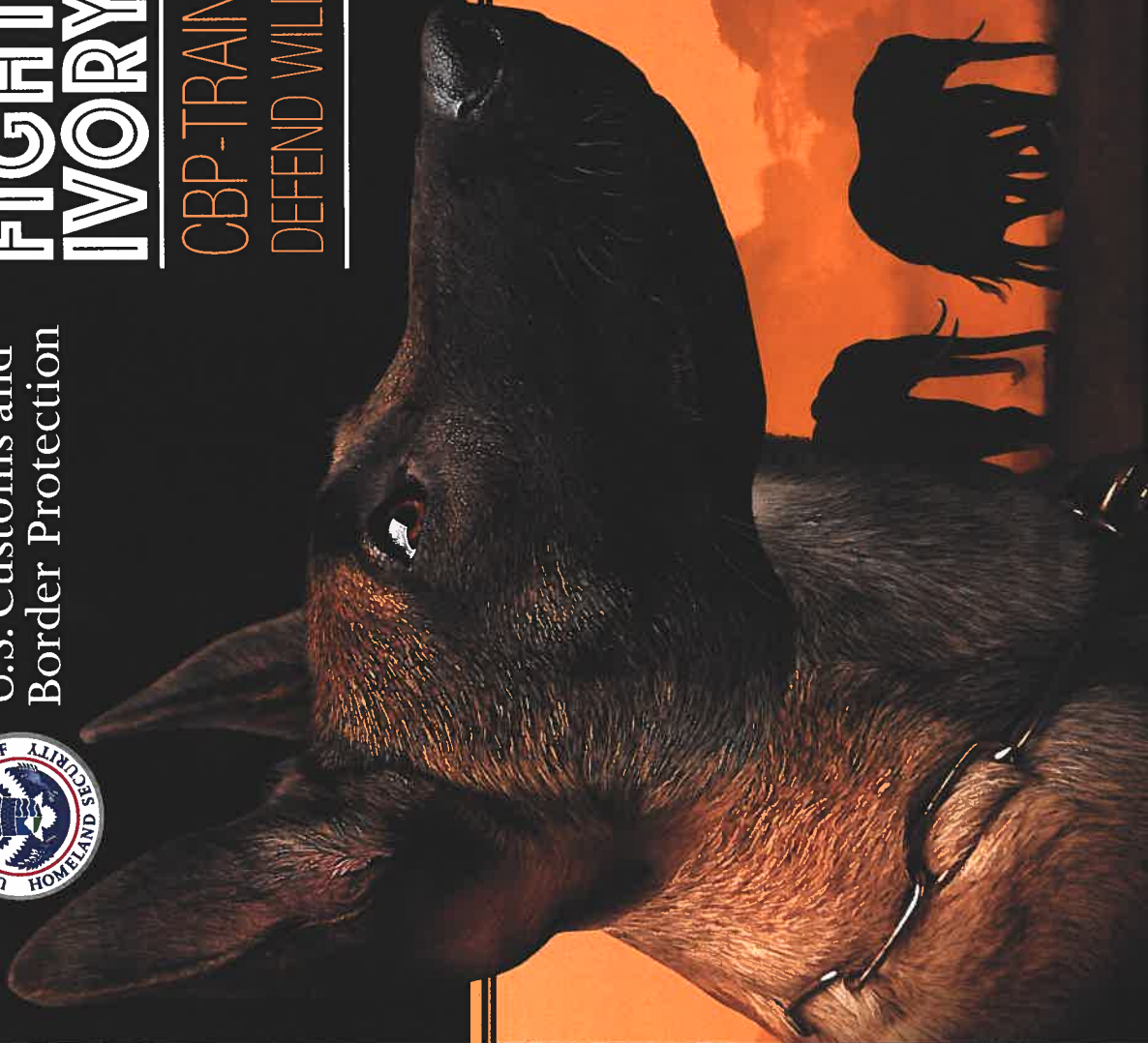


U.S. Customs and
Border Protection

FIGHTING THE IVORY TRADE

CBP-TRAINED CANINES
DEFEND WILDLIFE IN AFRICA

By Paul Koscak



There's a wildlife crisis in Tanzania.

Poachers have killed 60 percent of Tanzania's prized elephants for their ivory tusks, reducing the animals from an estimated 109,000 in 2009 to 43,000 in 2014. "Those numbers are just devastating," said Chargé d'Affaires Virginia Blaser at the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam. "You can easily see a scenario where they'll be no elephants in Tanzania."

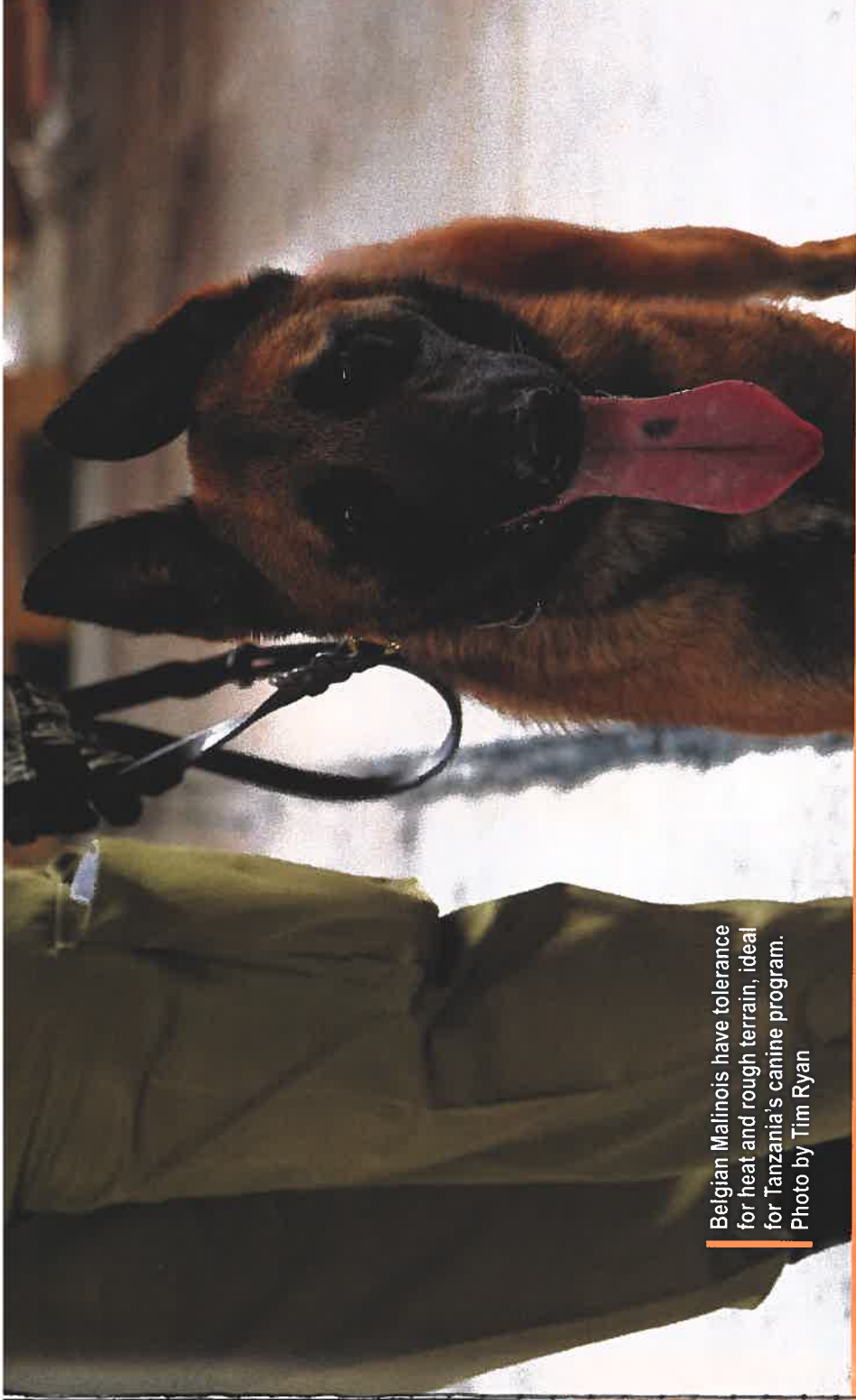
China is the world's biggest peddler, fueling at least 70 percent of the illicit ivory trade, followed by the Philippines and Thailand where status and money drive demand, a British Broadcasting Corporation report found.

In those and other nations, ivory is a way to flaunt social rank and wealth by owning jewelry, ornaments

and exquisite sculptures fashioned from ivory. Chinese medicine also touts ground ivory for curing everything from epilepsy to sore throats.

Staggering black market prices in Asia for the white gold entices poachers. Ivory can fetch up to \$1,500 per pound and two male elephant tusks can weigh 250 pounds, according to an account in British news magazine, *The Week*.

In their pursuit of wealth, poachers can be ruthless. In June 2016, they shot down a surveillance helicopter with AK-47 assault rifles in Northern Tanzania, killing the pilot. Poachers not only put elephants at risk, they harm Tanzania's economy with increased crime that discourages wildlife tourism, a major source of that nation's foreign exchange.



Belgian Malinois have tolerance for heat and rough terrain, ideal for Tanzania's canine program.
Photo by Tim Ryan

CBP STEPS UP

Working on behalf of the Tanzanian government, the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam reached out to former Commissioner R. Gil Kerlikowske for assistance in developing that country's canine program, particularly how to train their dogs to detect ivory. As a result, CBP's highly experienced canine handlers were tasked to work with Tanzanian law enforcement to combat wildlife trafficking. This wasn't the first time CBP instructors offered international assistance. They've provided training for at least 54 countries.

Assistance began when Damian Montes, director of CBP's canine program in El Paso, Texas, and Timothy Spittler, CBP's assistant canine director from Front Royal, Virginia, spent a week evaluating Tanzania's canine program that maintains about 45 working dogs to see where improvements were needed.

Montes and Spittler found shortcomings in the program. "There was no mentor opportunity," Montes said. "And the handlers needed to better understand how environmental factors such as weather and kennel conditions affect canine ability, as well as proper grooming techniques and how to train handlers in problem solving."

INTERNATIONAL EFFORT

From their findings, Montes and Spittler crafted a plan tailored to strengthen the nation's canine program which offers Tanzanian police the most effective ways to train, maintain and use dogs to locate ivory, heroin and cocaine. Elevating Tanzania's program to where Tanzanian police accomplish these tasks without assistance is the ultimate goal.

Establishing the program wasn't easy. The U.S. Embassy coordinated a government-wide effort that included the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Department of Defense and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Basics, such as potable water, kennels, retrofitting vehicles to transport canines, and fuel were needed along with support from the Tanzanian government and non-governmental organizations.

"We built an entire logistics, training, delivery and operational element that required resources guaranteed by multiple agencies and country support," Montes explained. "We had phenomenal support from Tanzanian law enforcement." Key Tanzanian government officials backed the program and divisions of Tanzanian law enforcement collaborated and shared resources.