

# Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter

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## Welcome by Dr Kate Evans



Firstly, I am sorry that it has been a while since our last update, it has been a busy time for us all. I have become the matriarch of my own small herd. Life has been a challenging but joyful whirlwind since our son arrived. This experience has made me appreciate the importance of elders and cultural knowledge in helping to raise a child.

Unfortunately I am now the oldest matriarch in my family; I felt a little lost at first without my mother's or grandmothers' knowledge to tap into. Thankfully I have many friends and extended family that are on hand to offer advice.

Motherhood has also made me realise the strength of family bonds. These bonds (both elephant and human) are being destroyed by the illegal ivory trade and the killing of elephants. The grief suffered by the herd when they find their dead, and the families that are torn apart by militia and terrorism (which is funded by the illicit gains of ivory) are the bonds and cultural knowledge we need to protect for Africa's future.

Social knowledge is vital to the long-term survival of elephants. The knowledge of where to go in times of drought is learned through elders leading the way to water and food. So the loss of these elders really affects their ability to survive.

On the 4th October 2014, people throughout the world took to the streets of 137 cities and towns, to march as one voice to save elephants and rhinos. *Elephants for Africa* team members were there in Maun and our new project manager – Dr Jess Isden – was also there to experience it. The team have been very busy in Botswana and we have had some staff changes.

Dr Emily Bennitt has taken up a position at the Okavango Research Institute in Maun as a research scholar in Large Herbivore Ecology. She is a dynamic and ambitious ecologist so we are excited about her opportunity and look forward to collaborating on future projects.

After six years with us, as a Masters student and then project leader, Mphoeng Ofithile has won a place at the new Botswana University of Science and Technology (BIUST) to do a PhD. He will still be working in the same area, addressing the issue of the fence line, and so our relationship with him will continue.

James Stevens, our PhD student, has been kept extremely active as he monitors the elephant crop-raiding activities on the western border of the national park, as well as observing male elephants. The funds raised at Memphis Zoo's 3rd Art for Elephants will contribute to his work.

Allie Mayberry, from the University of Guelph in Canada, has joined us in camp as she collects data for her Masters looking at the community perspective of crop-raiding in the area. And Steffi Nett, a Masters student at Mainz University in Germany, returned to collect data for her project during the dry season.

Dr Jess Isden replaces Mphoeng and Emily as our project manager. She is a behavioural ecologist who has specialised in the incredible bowerbirds of Australasia. We look forward to her input as we unveil the social ecology of the male elephants in our study site.

## First Impressions by Jess Isden



I have been in the national park for almost two months now and every day continues to bring new adventures. Despite promising myself that my next fieldwork will be somewhere cold, I am somehow drawn to these hot, dusty places and never fail to be disappointed.

Earlier this year I completed my PhD at the University of Exeter in the UK. My studies focussed on a species of bird that resides in the Australian outback – similar conditions to those of the northern Kalahari. I was researching the breeding behaviour and social dynamics of the Australian bowerbird. This is a significantly smaller creature than an elephant, but equally fascinating in its behaviour and evolution.

Male bowerbirds create intricate display areas, which are extravagantly decorated with hundreds of coloured objects. When females visit these courtship theatres, the males put on their best show, dancing, calling and sometimes throwing their favourite objects towards her in an attempt to impress. I spent long hours in the Australian bush discovering more about these extraordinary little birds.

My PhD builds on my previous academic experience, having completed a degree in geography and a Masters in conservation.

However, no amount of academia prepares you for arriving in one of Botswana's famous national parks.

When I first pulled up to the Khumaga gate crossing on the Boteti River I was excited to see kingfishers, rollers and egrets darting along the river banks.

After successfully negotiating the small boat crossing with all my luggage, I was met by hundreds of zebra and wildebeest causing a dust storm as they strode down to the river for a drink. Soon after, a small herd of impala dashed across the road, followed sedately by several giraffe, travelling just as fast but using fewer footsteps to do so.

I arrived in camp, but alas had not managed to spot an elephant on the way in. The afternoon passed in a haze of introductions, unpacking and inspecting the food store.

The next morning I set off with Mphoeng and Steffi for my first research session. Five hours later, we returned to camp still having not seen an elephant. I was starting to wonder whether there really were several hundreds of males in the park.

However, a short distance from camp the following day I was treated to a magnificent first sighting – eight males splashing and cavorting in the river together. I hadn't realised that watching an elephant play in the water could lift your mood so greatly, and two months in it still never fails to raise a smile.

I am very excited to have this opportunity to work with EfA as we continue to develop our research on the use of the river as not only an important water resource, but also a social resource where males congregate in large numbers.

I am very enthusiastic about taking our education programme forward into a new phase, and learning more about the challenges that the local communities face living alongside the wildlife of the park. I also look forward to sharing more stories about life here in the bush.



# Human-Elephant Conflict; a Community Perspective

by Allie Mayberry



I am a Geography graduate from the University of Guelph in Canada. Kate invited me to conduct my study with EfA and the research team has given me a warm welcome. I will be researching the impact of elephants on the daily lives, routines, and overall well-being of people in the Boteti region.

The nearby village of Khumaga and its surrounding cattle posts are separated from the national park by the Boteti River. The river, which until 2009 had been dry for nearly 20 years, has recently become a permanent and reliable water source for humans and wildlife occupying this region.

This has drawn many (primarily male) elephants to nearby human settlements, resulting in an increased prevalence of human-elephant conflict in an area that is not accustomed to dealing with such a problem. For example, elephants will often enter farmers' fields causing loss of crops and damage to property.

But what about the other ways in which elephants affect the lives of humans? To date, there has been little research conducted on the hidden consequences of living with elephants.

For example, do frequent and potentially dangerous encounters with elephants cause long-term stress?

Do humans feel that elephants restrict their movements between village centres and remote cattle posts? Does living with an elephant problem rupture social relations or bring a community together?

Answering these questions will provide insights that are essential for implementing viable solutions for human-elephant co-existence.

Whilst in the field, I conducted hour-long interviews with the residents of Khumaga, asking them to share their stories about life with elephants. This, of course, would not be possible without the assistance of two local research assistants, Mankind and Charlton, who translate for me.

People of all ages have been keen to express their opinions and even persuade me to help them with their daily tasks such as fetching water and thatching roofs!

It is my firm belief that you cannot come up with a solution to human-elephant conflict without understanding the problem holistically, taking into account both human and elephant needs within their shared environments. I am excited to be working alongside EfA, with the shared goal of mitigating human-elephant conflict in the Boteti region.



## Male Elephants by Steffi Nett



Elephants' social behaviour fascinates me, this is why I decided to focus my research on them for my Master's degree. I discovered that EfA could enable me to carry out my fieldwork in Botswana on male elephants.

My first few nights in camp were really exiting. I could hear the animals around the camp. Sometimes the animals were so close to my tent that I could hear them breathing. Trying to tell which animals were making what noise is often hard because an animal as small as a francolin (a bird the size of a chicken) can make a really big noise, whilst an elephant can be almost silent.

One night, loud rustling in the trees woke me. I peered out and saw a giraffe about 5 metres away from my tent, I watched and was mesmerized for ages. In the mornings the monkeys often wake me up by jumping on my tent and using it as a trampoline.

For my project I am comparing the social behaviour and grouping in male elephants in the national park under different environmental conditions. For this I am collecting data in the rainy and the dry season as well as in different habitat types. I will be joining the EFA team on their daily research sessions.

The first drives were really exciting; you get to see more than elephants. I spotted zebras, kudus, wildebeest and ostriches. Most of the species I have never seen before in the wild. To see wild elephants for the first time was very special.

The amount of elephants that you can see depends on habitat. Away from the river the elephants are more dispersed and mostly in smaller groups. Often you can observe them whilst they eat, resting under trees or walking. On the river the elephants come together and you can see big aggregations.

Once I saw a meeting of 40 male elephants, all together on the river, it was spectacular. As I was watching them and taking my notes, there was suddenly a loud noise and they all were running at the same time in different directions. I never did work out why but it was an amazing sighting.

The river is also a very social place for the elephants and here you can observe them greeting each other, taking a bath, dusting or playing together.

The study area is dominated by male elephants, however we are lucky to see a family group with their young offspring, which is always a pleasure. To work with elephants and observe their social behaviour is very interesting and a great experience for me. Now there's the hard part, writing it up.



## Art for Elephants



In October, the Memphis Zoo hosted their 3rd annual Art for Elephants fundraiser.

This year was by far the most successful; it secured over \$4000 which will go towards James Steven's work on human-elephant conflict in the study area.

It was a fun-filled day with activities for the children and zoo volunteers on hand with information for the public about the ivory crisis.

A huge thank you to Amanda Hadicke and her team for organising such a successful event; we look forward to next year.

## Train the Trainers Workshop

In July we hosted a workshop for environmental educators throughout Botswana. This was a huge milestone and we would like to thank *Care for the Wild* for funding it and our partners in this aspect of our work: the Chicago Zoological Society (CZS).

Veronica Ramirez of CZS taught the course, which enables the participants to train their own personnel in the use of simple scientific methodology.

This engages people in their environment and the skills needed to solve local problems with home-grown solutions.

EfA and the CZS see the role of communities in the conservation of the African elephant as vital.

If these communities can work towards human-wildlife coexistence, as well as directly benefit from wildlife, then the future of elephants and other wildlife will be more secure.



# The Global March for Elephant and Rhino

## by Jess Isden



On Saturday 4th October thousands of people marched in 137 different cities worldwide to show their support for the conservation of elephants and rhinos. The march aimed to put pressure on governments and authorities across the world to stop the poaching of elephants and rhinos for ivory and horn. Poaching levels across Africa have reached crisis point and are having a devastating impact on population numbers and social structures.

In Maun (the nearest town to our research camp) more than 300 people turned out to march through the streets. We gathered early to avoid the heat of the day (October is the hottest month) and there was a distinct buzz amongst the crowd as various costumes and banners were unfurled.

At 9am the march began, accompanied by drums and singing. We followed a float decorated with large wooden cut-outs of an elephant and rhino filled with the handprints of children. Traffic was paused for us as we walked along the main street, before turning to head towards the airport; a poignant reminder that tourism in Botswana relies heavily on the protection of its wildlife and plays a hugely significant role in the economy.

Botswana has one of the lowest rates of poaching in southern Africa, and is often cited as a flagship country for its anti-poaching and conservation initiatives. In other countries, the problem is much more significant.

The Global March organisers particularly hoped that the protests would put pressure on the countries listed by CITES (the international treaty set up to protect wildlife against exploitation) because they are not doing enough to prevent the illegal trafficking of ivory.

These countries include China, Vietnam, Kenya and Mozambique. Here in Maun, we all hoped that the coming together of researchers, residents and officials would help secure an end to the ivory and rhino horn trade and allow populations the chance to recover and flourish.

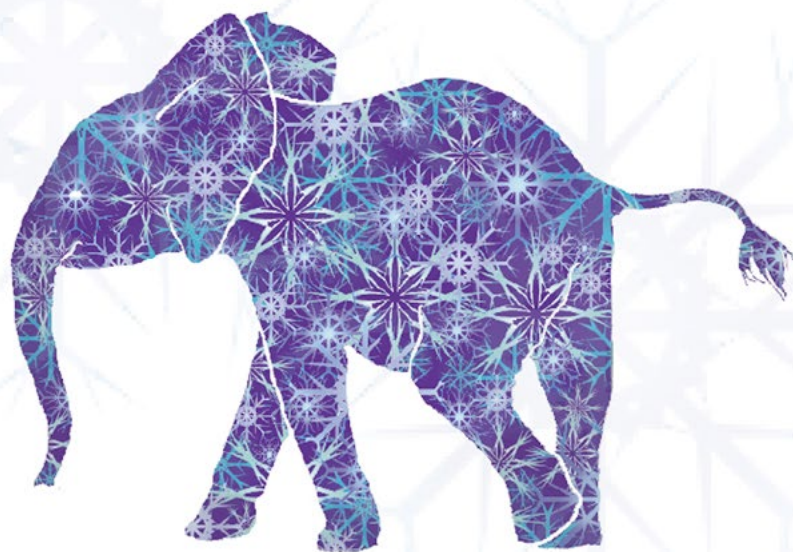
Marching along with fellow enthusiasts was uplifting. As our march came to an end we gathered under the shade of the trees to listen to some inspiring speeches from the organisers of the Maun Global March team and local conservation representatives. There was a particular focus on children, many of whom had taken time to produce an array of colourful masks, pictures and posters, emphasising the responsibility we all have to protect their heritage and prevent the killing of elephant and rhino.

At the current rates of loss, future generations may miss out on the opportunity to see these magnificent creatures in the wild. To think that we provided a small addition to the millions who marched worldwide on that day gives us hope that the message regarding illegal poaching and trade in wildlife products will be heard and acted upon.



# Christmas Cards

Wishing you a very  
Merry Christmas  
and a  
Happy New Year.



This year's design has been created and kindly donated by Su Lees.

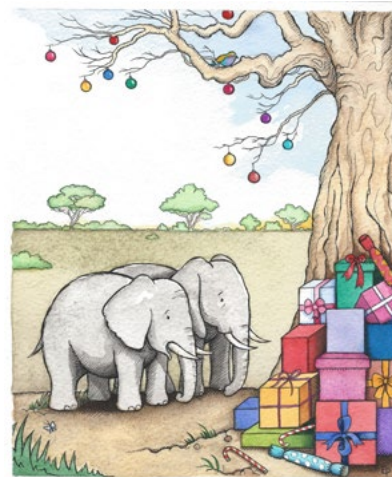
<http://susanjanelees.blogspot.de/>

There are also some remaining from last year's design.

To order, simply email us at [order@elephantsforafrica.org](mailto:order@elephantsforafrica.org) with your name, address and the quantity that you would like.

Payment can be accepted through PayPal, bank transfer or cheque.

The price remains the same at £6 for a pack of 10 but if you order 3 packs or more, then the price is £5 per pack, plus £1.50 for postage.



\* All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth.\*

## In Memory of Jim

A kind donation was received from the family of Jim Gauld who died unexpectedly while on safari in Botswana, aged 88.

He bred sheep and alpacas at home in Australia and was thrilled to see African animals in their native environment.

Jim died in August 2013 at a bush camp in the Okavango Delta. With the tent flap open to the sky his spirit 'went bush'. He knew the importance of caring for the country and caring for wildlife.





## Kate Evans Visits Chicago Zoological Society (CZS)



In October, the CZS hosted Kate Evans for a week. During this time, she gave a talk as part of their lecture series. She met with educators, researchers and trustees to discuss EfA's current and future work.

Kate was also honoured to be invited back to Misericordia, a really inspiring residential home for people with developmental disabilities. Kate and her son were made to feel so welcome and were able to enjoy the artwork and projects the residents had worked on prior to our visit.

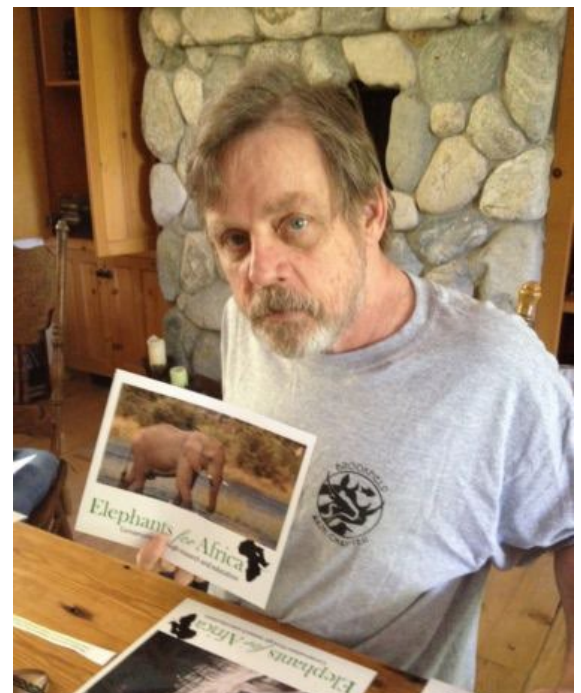
They had been researching the current plight of the African elephants and on art work to capture how beautiful the elephants are.

During the day the Misericordia's participants were awarded Certificates of Elephant Advocacy from Kate and the Chicago Zoological Society. They were also asked to continue spreading the word about the African elephant.

After the evening lecture, Brookfield Zoo presented Kate with a cheque representing money they had raised primarily through the auctioning of Mark Hamill's autographed photographs. Mark (aka Luke Skywalker) had donated these to the AAZK for their fundraising activities.

Mr Hamill also passed on his wishes to the EfA team, thanking them for caring for these magnificent creatures.

*\*charter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK)*







## How to Donate

Should you wish to make a donation, you can do this online through BT's MyDonate page:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/elephantsforafrica>

Or you can pay directly to our bank account:

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Bank: The Co-Operative Bank PLC

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We accept cheques made payable to:

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c/o Mrs Buckingham  
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## Special Thanks to:

- Mr & Mrs Davis' - for the Pagella's wedding
- Headington School, Oxford
- Trich Zaitoon & Les Littlejohn
- Su Lees
- Mark Hamill for his signed photographs
- Brookfield AAZK

## Recycle Mobile Phones

If you have recently purchased a new phone or a PDA, remember to recycle your old ones through Recycle4Charity quoting *Elephants for Africa* and we shall receive a donation.

## Our facebook page

We have moved from our group on facebook to a new page. So for those who enjoy our regular updates please 'like' this page:

<https://www.facebook.com/elephantsforafrica>

