

# Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter

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## Welcome - Rebecca Dannock



This year, we have welcomed a new team member, Walona Sehularo, who is originally from Maun. Walona joined us in January 2018 as our Community Outreach Officer and has settled into camp and work life well. His role is to coordinate our community work and the environment clubs. This includes increasing our work with the youth of Khumaga.

Alongside these roles, Walona has been developing strong relationships with the community and its representatives. On page 5, Walona details his first impressions on working with EfA and his new life in the research camp.

With Walona's help, our work with the community has deepened in recent months, with increasing focus being put on young people. Until recently, we have largely worked with school children, and the older farming community, but have not specifically worked with 18-35yr olds. We have begun working with this age group to improve their preparation for jobs and ability to write business cases.

Meanwhile, our Community Coexistence Project (CCP) has continued, with ongoing support for the farmers during the cropping season, and we continue to deliver monthly environment clubs.

Our research is also currently in a growth phase with the development of new lines of enquiry and new collaborations being formed. Our scientific officer Hayley, details our work developing a program to understand elephant movements to and from the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, and our burgeoning partnership with SnapshotSafari.

This is a group working on a citizen science platform to help organisations like us analyse our camera trap images with input from a global community of citizen scientists.

In other research news, our PhD student Connie is starting to find some really interesting trends when viewing her camera trap videos of male elephants' responses to elephant dung and urine samples. Connie's project, as well as our research, has continued to benefit from Thatayaone's work. He has spent a lot of time in the field working on these projects, which he updates us on.

In July we will welcome two student expedition groups from National Geographic. They are travelling to Botswana to learn about living here, developing research programs and working alongside communities to affect change. These students will assist us with our work in the community and the second group will also assist with the other exciting event on the horizon: our Community Football Tournament.

The tournament, held to engage the youth of Khumaga through conservation teachings and football workshops, will be led by a group of professional football coaches who are travelling here from across the world under the organisation of *Soccer in the Community*.

All in all, there is a lot of expansion and new developments occurring at EfA at the moment. This means it is an exciting time to be involved, whether as a team member, a community member, a supporter or a citizen scientist!



## Research Update - Hayley Blackwell



After more than five years of collecting data on male elephant demographics and social relationships in the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, we are now excited to be expanding the focus of our research into new areas. The data contribute to our long-term dataset, helping to shed new insights into the importance of “bull areas” such as the Makgadikgadi, an area recently re-colonised by elephants after the resurgence of the Boteti River in 2009.

One interesting finding has been that the Makgadikgadi elephant population is almost entirely made up of transient bulls, which spend periods of time in the park before leaving and then returning months later. This raises new questions about where elephants are coming from before arriving at the national park, and where they go when they leave.

We are in the process of designing new research methodologies investigating these questions and the first step is to carry out spoor surveys along the boundaries of the park. This will involve recording signs that elephants have crossed over the boundaries, identifying the major exit and entry points and gaining an initial idea of the movement patterns of arriving and leaving elephants.

Closely related to this is the movement of elephants through the neighbouring communities, which we also intend to study in more detail. However, in order to carry out these new areas of research, we need a new vehicle.

After the untimely demise of our old land cruiser, we no longer have a vehicle rugged enough to cope with the difficult terrain that the spoor surveys will demand.

Firstly, a massive THANKYOU to anyone who donated to our online crowd funder campaign. We really do value your support. For those that missed out, we are still looking for donations, and any amount, no matter how small, is greatly appreciated. Please visit our website if you would like to contribute.

It’s not all change though. We are still continuing with our current lines of research, and have recently made progress with our camera trap project. In 2017 we took down the last of the camera traps, situated on elephant trails leading to the river, after almost three years of continuous surveying, during which time we amassed over 187,000 images!

We have now joined up with SnapshotSafari, from the University of Minnesota, who have started to work with research teams and reserve managers to create citizen science web platforms, in order to process images from camera trap surveys.

This allows everyday people around the world to view the camera trap images online and, using helpful guides and tutorials, assist with classifying the images. If you would like to get involved with EfA’s camera trap project, please visit: [snapshot-safari](http://snapshot-safari) to get started. Our data should be live by the end of July.



## My New Job - Thatayaone Motsentwa



I joined the EfA team full time in August 2017, but time has gone by so quickly! Originally I worked part-time as a chilli plot assistant in my village of Khumaga. Since joining camp, I have not looked back. I am now a research assistant to Connie as she undertakes the fieldwork for her PhD. This has really challenged me because it is all very new. I am finding it very rewarding and have learned many things when accompanying her.

During the research drives I have learnt that whilst all male elephants look big, that doesn't mean they are of the same age. We have a number of indicators to help us estimate their age, such as head and tusk shape. I have also learnt that it is easy to identify individual elephants.

This can be done through taking ID photographs of elephants and the key features of their bodies can be used to distinguish an individual, such as tail hair or tusk form, as well their ear notches.

I have also learnt that in each group of elephants there is always a leader, even though sometimes you can find males of the same age hanging out together. I didn't expect this, I thought males just did their own thing independently of others.

Video sessions are very different; in these we record elephant behaviour while they are on the riverbank. These videos will be analysed back in the office, to see how males interact with each other and how that changes depending on the elephant's age.

I have discovered that there is always socializing among the groups; there are certain behaviours among elephants like greetings and mounting etc.

During video sessions we focus on one individual elephant from the time he arrives at the river to when he leaves. He is always in the camera frame and we provide commentary on his behaviour and who he is associating with; this can last 10 minutes or 5 hours!

In one of the video sessions at Hippo Pools, I had my favourite elephant encounter so far. We were in the car for some time while recording a group of elephants. It was about 1pm; one 16-20yr old, who seemed calm when we first saw him, chose to pass within 10 metres of our car, heading to the mud pool. But then he then turned to us. I was in the driver's seat thinking of starting the engine to drive away, and the same time thinking he may charge if I did.

It is very common with most animals that whenever they come across something unexpected, they either attack or run away. This male came closer, he then sniffed the car and made a head shake throwing sand over us through the open windows. He then finally moved away.

Connie and I bravely stayed there and then smiled. That was my first time ever being so close to an elephant!



## In the Footsteps of Giants - Walona Sehularo



In January 2018, I joined a team at the forefront of conservation. Having never lived in the bush for more than a few weeks, my heart fluttered but it also danced in joy at the memories I was sure were going to be made in camp.

The team members were very helpful during my settling in, both into camp life and my role as Community Outreach Officer. Having the guidance and wisdom of both present and past team members was a great help in letting me hit the ground running. My welcome into the community and schools was warm and heartfelt.

Being a novice to all things elephant, I was given an introduction to their ecology and behaviour. Next came how to identify, age and give overall descriptions of elephants during research drives. An artform built upon science that I'm still a long way from mastering like the rest of the team have!

But slowly I've begun to grasp it and have just the slight nuances left to learn; not all elephants fall neatly into groups.

The farmers also gave me a welcome that I expected, they ruffle my feathers a bit but only with love and no animosity.

They shared that, even when they doubted the chili bricks could be effective, seeing them work with their own eyes was all the testimony they needed.

They gave me a peek into the challenges they face and how EfA has helped them overcome some of those challenges. I learnt from their experiences of what worked and why.

They also shared their belief that only through hardwork and cooperation with everyone involved can the struggle with elephants be turned from conflict to coexistence.

The team and the students taught me a lot about how to go about environmental club lessons. Attendance and participation have been great with all students bringing in their unique outlooks and views into the club. Learning to keep the lesson down to 2 hours when the fun could go on for longer was a challenge!

However, the eagerness to learn and to love the environment, with all its treasures, keep me and the team going. 104 children receive two hours of fun and education every month so that they may follow in the footsteps of giants; the future does look bright from this corner of the world.



## Community CoExistence Update



Community engagement is often overlooked in the scientific world, but in recent times they have realised the importance of having the community both educated and involved.

Science communicators like David Attenborough, Carl Sagan and more recently Hashem Al-Ghaili, have shown that by returning awe and wonder to the eyes of those who live day-to-day surrounded by the natural world, does more for science and conservation than an outside messiah could ever hope to do.

EfA's Community Coexistence Project is the bridge in bringing the wonder of elephants from the Makgadikgadi Pans back into a community that has lived most of its life never really seeing elephants for years, to now seeing them daily. The project aims to bring hope to farmers whose struggle to save their livelihoods means conflict with elephants.

To bring hope to a community, that as Allison Mayberry's study showed, has many hidden impacts that stretch far beyond observable metrics but are still deeply felt. The CCP programme for me is not only a proactive measure to build coexistence, but a science communication tool to re-foster the awe of nature, and building holistic coexistence at the same time.

But, a subset of the community has so far been outside of our valiant efforts; the youth.

Young children have EleFun and the elders have farmer-related programmes. With this in mind, we focused more of our efforts this year into spreading the message of conservation to young adults whilst also offering them uplifting programmes.

In February, in collaboration with WildCRU, we held a youth workshop in Khumaga that was well attended. The workshop detailed how to prepare a CV and covering letter and taught interview skills.

Then in March, at the Conservation Agriculture workshop, the youth made up a large majority of the people in attendance. And in April, in collaboration with the Moreomaoto Public Library, WildCRU and a Peace Corps volunteer, we delivered a workshop touching on similar topics to the one held in Khumaga. Youth participation in these showed the hunger they have to be involved in programmes run by us.

With this in mind we have planned to send young people to two 5-day workshops on book-keeping and writing business plans.

We have also planned a soccer-based conservation initiative with professional coaching staff from abroad to further youth involvement in conservation efforts.

Having an intersectional approach to community work will have a greater impact and hopefully a longer lasting one too.



## Environment Club Update - Rebecca Dannock



Since our last newsletter, we have continued to deliver monthly environmental clubs at both our partner primary schools in Khumaga and Mogolokwane.

During this time, we were also fortunate enough to receive a visit from Matthieu Jousset, of the GoodPlanet Foundation (GPF). GPF support our Khumaga Environment Clubs, along with our Community Coexistence Project. Matthieu attended one of our sessions at Khumaga and was able to see the GPF resources, including the school chilli plot, in action. The visit was a success, with Matthieu being impressed by our work with the school and with Walona's ability to inspire passion and action among the students.

This passion that the students have is really one of the great joys of working for EfA. Whenever we enter one of the villages in which we run the clubs, we are greeted by excited students looking forward to their next activity with us.

This, coupled with our ability to watch their growing knowledge about the environment and their burgeoning feeling of responsibility for it, gives us a great sense that the program is not only benefitting the communities today, but that the benefit will last long into the future. Our ongoing clubs have been greatly improved through our current project to develop a two year

syllabus, with a lesson plan created for each two hour club. Each of these lesson plans has been developed with guidance from the teachers at the schools, members of our Education Advisory Board and officers from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks.

This ensures that the students are receiving vital revision of environmental themes without duplicating the school curriculum. And the activities are instilling the students with the knowledge and practical skills needed to pursue a career in conservation.

The lesson plans all include the key learnings, the materials required and how to deliver them, as well as a schedule of how long each activity should take. These plans have been developed to provide a strong foundation for the clubs which can eventually be rolled out to other schools, and even led by teachers with limited experience of environmental education.

The teacher's notes and activity sheets, along with the lesson plan, make it an easy-to-follow guide, with all the background information needed to teach the lessons and carry out the activities.

We look forward to having the full syllabus completed towards the end of the year, and to roll this curriculum out to more schools.



## Communicating by Smell - Connie Allen



Long-standing supporters of EfA will have read much about my on-going studies on the social-dynamics of male African elephants in the Makgadikgadi.

I first came to the park in 2015 to commence studies using video to monitor the social behaviour of individual bulls at the Boteti river. I focused on themes such as mentorship between older bulls and adolescents, social learning, changes in behaviour with age, and social networking in male elephant society.

Last year I expanded this project to encompass an ambitious experiment exploring olfactory communication between bull elephants along the elephant highways.

The landscape of Botswana is scarred with ancient elephant highways; set routes that elephants will follow through an environment. I hypothesise that elephants may be monitoring deposits of urine and dung left by other elephants utilising the highway ahead of them, drawing potential benefits from these social cues concerning assessment of elephants they may expect to encounter.

Using remote camera traps along highways leading to the Boteti River, I am monitoring the responses of passing elephants to purposefully laid samples of dung and urine from known aged elephants.

It has been shown that the chemical composition of elephant urine changes with elephant age and sexual state.

I am taking this knowledge into a wild context to determine whether, with their exceptional smelling capabilities, male elephants can distinguish characteristics of an elephant from his dung or urine deposit alone, and react with a differing response accordingly.

From my initial observations I am noticing some interesting trends in behaviour. Urine samples from older elephants (21+ years) appear to draw more attention and are investigated for longer compared to deposits from sub-adults.

Older elephants seem also themselves to be more attentive to samples on highways compared to younger adolescents, and furthermore, elephants traveling alone appear to be more concerned with these "social cues".

With more detailed statistical analysis, this study will uncover an array of interesting discoveries about how male elephants (animals with no set territoriality) communicate with, and monitor each other's movements over time and vast spaces.

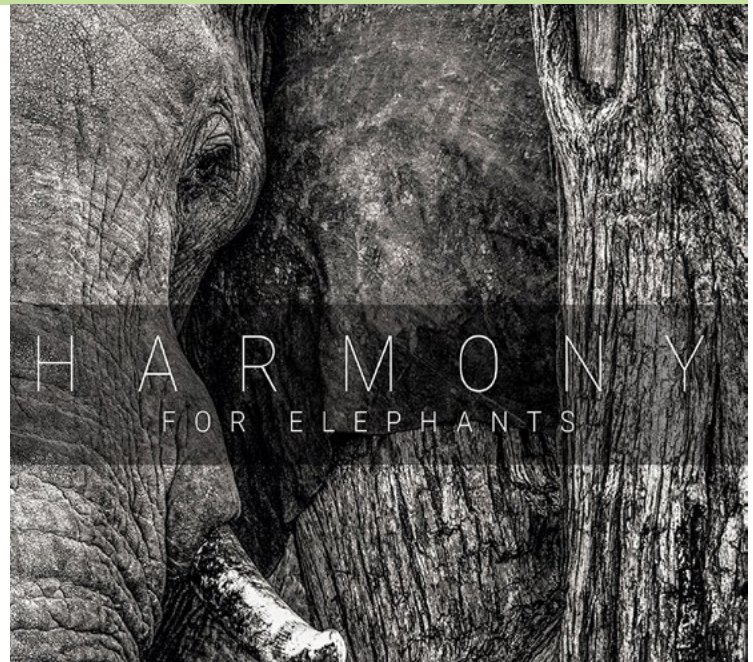
I eagerly anticipate returning to the UK at the end of this final field season, to begin my write-up period.



# Fundraising News



MARYLAND  
ZOO



As always, we would like to extend a very large thank you to all that have supported our work this year. In particular Mr & Mrs Graham, Kenilworth School, Wellington School, The Knowle Society and Mokolo Crafts.

Additional thanks go to our Facebook Fundraisers who through the *I donate my birthday* initiative, have raised nearly £1500. We are also grateful to have been gifted a donation in the will of Dr Rosie Songo-Williams. This donation has been used to support our outreach work and our Community Outreach Officer, Mr Walona Sehularo.

We welcome the Memphis Zoo as a contributing partner. They have long supported our work with their annual *Art for Elephants* fundraiser and through their staff members winning CAN grants to help us with equipment costs.

Thanks also to the Maryland Zoological Society for their continued support and we are very pleased to announce that we are being assisted by the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium through their conservation fund. We have also won support from the Martin Willis Wildlife Trust this year.



## Vehicle Fundraiser

Thank you to everybody who have helped raise monies towards the purchase of a good second hand vehicle to deal with the harsh terrain of our study area and expand our community outreach work.

We are still quite a long way from our target of £15,000. However, thanks to the incredible generosity of a friend of EfA, the target is still very much within our reach. They have pledged to match any donations by 3:1, so for every £1 you donate, £3 will make its way to us.

So now is the time to roll up your sleeves and get baking for that cake sale at work or tie the laces up as you train for that sponsored run because for every cake that you sell and kilometre you run the money you raise will be worth three times as much.

Please check out this [video](#) that the team made to show how the vehicle will be used and the work it will support.

## RESEARCH VEHICLE

We live and work in a harsh remote environment and therefore the vehicles need to be strong and reliable.







## 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, please contact us for details.

We accept cheques made payable to:

*Elephants for Africa*  
Dr Kate Evans  
2 Priest Park View  
Warwick Road  
Chadwick End  
Solihull  
B93 0BP

## Our Facebook Page:

If you enjoy regular updates from the field, please like our page:

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

## Recycle Mobile Phones

If you have recently purchased a new phone or a PDA, remember to recycle your old ones by sending them to us at the above address.

## Donation Wish List:

- £20 - A pair of children's binoculars
- £45 - Delivery of a class to Environmental Club
- £50 - Teacher visit to the National Park
- £100 - Take ten pupils in to the park for one day
- £200 - Delivery of a workshop to a community
- £250 - One month's fuel for research
- £400 - Equipment box for Environmental Club
- £500 - New Research Tent
- £800 - Monthly cost of hiring an education officer
- £2500 - Production of 'Living With' workshop video to donate to the communities

## Special Thanks to:

- Columbus Zoo & Aquarium
- Mr & Mrs Graham
- Kenilworth School
- The Knowle Society
- Maryland Zoological Society
- Martin Willis Wildlife Trust
- Memphis Zoo
- Mokolo Crafts
- Dr Rosie Songo-Williams
- Simon Buckingham
- Wellington School