

# Elephants For Africa

Conservation through research & education



Charity Number: 1122027

## Elephant Tails

Issue 13

April 2011

[Www.ElephantsForAfrica.org](http://www.ElephantsForAfrica.org)

[info@ElephantsForAfrica.org](mailto:info@ElephantsForAfrica.org)

## Welcome from Dr Kate Evans

### Special points of interest:

- Art for sale
- Thando comes into musth
- Elefun was had by all
- Farewell to

### Inside this issue:

Thando's 1st Musth	2
Elefun	3
Su Lees—visiting artist	3
A year in the Delta	5
Easy Fundraising	7
Art for sale	7
Contact details	7

At EfA, 2011 has got off to a very busy start and looks set to remain so. Our Elefun weekend programme got off to an incredible start in February when we welcomed 12 children to Seba Camp to learn about elephants and address the many fears, myths and fables that surround them. Talking about his experience, our Operations Manager, Simon Buckingham said "It was one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. To see the joy and excitement on the children's faces when they met elephants up close and personal is something that I will never forget."

Looking a little further afield, parts of Africa are experiencing an ivory poaching problem of such cataclysmic proportions that it could potentially exceed the severe devastation to the elephant population that occurred during the dark days of the 70's and 80's. The number of seizures and quantity of ivory confiscated at ports and airports around the world appears to be increasing, but the sad truth is that then it's already too late for the elephant. We don't know if the authorities are becoming more effective in identifying these illegal shipments, or are simply

capturing a similar proportion of a much larger quantity. In addition, the simple law of supply and demand suggests that confiscations may even lead to more elephants being killed.

In Botswana we are host to the largest remaining population of elephants and there is concern that the poachers

are likely to be faced with the total extinction of the African elephant, proceeded by numerous local extinctions in the very near future. For your part, please educate friends and family not to buy any ivory products.

Unfortunately, also on a sad note, news reaches us from all over Africa and Asia about the tragedies of human-elephant conflict (HEC), both human and elephant. If we cannot find a solution to Human-Elephant co-existence then the lives of many humans and elephants are in jeopardy. In Botswana, the superb habitat



may eventually turn their attention here. Currently poaching does occur, but fortunately it is at relatively low levels. Locally, Elephant Back Safaris who hold the lease for the 2000+km<sup>2</sup> concession that's home to the EfA team, have already implemented practical actions in the form of a permanent anti-poaching unit. Their skill, mobility and 24/7 presence in the area allowed them to make 33 arrests in 2010.

Ultimately, if we cannot put a stop to the demand for ivory then we

swana, the superb habitat and low human population density in the north of the country is very enticing for elephants. In addition, the recent combination of high local rainfall and record floods in the Okavango Delta has led to sustained water availability over a much larger area than has occurred for many, many years. Elephants have quickly begun to explore and rediscover old rangelands, such as those around the Boteti river which started flowing again in 2009 after a



Charlie and Kate enjoy the sunset

‘There was also a fresh pile of steaming dung, which I was able to collect; a very valuable sample for our male hormone study.’



## Welcome note from Dr Kate Evans

break of over 40 years.

As farmers try to protect their livelihoods the number of elephant deaths is increasing. At EfA, we have now identified over 900 individual elephants and from the data we have on our released elephants, we know that many of them are utilizing land outside of protected areas (in fact, some studies estimate that more than two thirds of all elephants exist outside of protected areas). We dread that we shall never see some of them ever again, as they may pay the ultimate price for trying to survive in areas that are becoming increasingly dominated by man.

All of Elephants For Africa's research efforts are focused to address

one or more of the conservation issues of the African elephant; specifically a number of new projects are being developed to try and mitigate human-elephant conflict. One such project will see a small team leave the Delta for a few weeks later this year to conduct a pilot study in three HEC hotspots. The aim is to identify what the specific local issues are and what EfA can do to have maximum impact. As part of the study we'll also be in discussion with a range of people and organisations, such as the DWNP Human-Animal Co-existence Project, safari companies, research projects and members of the local communities.

As we welcome in

April we are preparing ourselves for the loss of our research assistant Charlie Ellis. She has been with us full-time, for nearly a year (see her article) and contributed a great deal to Elephants For Africa and all that we are trying to achieve. She has volunteered her time and given more than we could ever have expected. We wish her the best of luck as she tries her hand at something new. We will miss her terribly and know that whatever she decides to do next, she will contribute to hugely with her enthusiasm and passion for life. On a personal note we shall miss her company, friendship, banter and her unsurpassed tea making skills.

## Thando experiences his 1st musth

Thando has recently been spending time in the area, but he has not visited us in camp..... until the other Sunday. I come up for breakfast and Joseph, a guide at the camp in which we stay, and a volunteer for EFA, was beside himself with excitement. Thando had just been in camp, right by the kitchen and he was in musth. Joseph showed me the tracks, the telltale signs of urine dribbling over his footprints (when they are in musth, male elephants advertise this by dribbling their urine and leaving their heavy scent for other males and females to read). There was also a fresh pile of steaming dung, which I was able to collect; a very valuable sample for our male hormone study.

After dealing with the sample, I jumped into the research vehicle and headed

out with the tracking equipment. Within 20 minutes I was with him and a small herd of females in thick terminalia

bush. I managed to get a half-hour focal, but during that half-hour all he did was stand with his head in a tree (so no relevant photos I am afraid). He appeared a little confused and as if he was embarrassed to be seen! I did manage to see that his temporal glands were swollen and that they were secreting, but unable to see if his penile sheath was green (all characteristics of musth).

He is only 23 years old and so this is quite early for



him to experience his first musth, as other studies show that they generally start coming into musth in their late twenties. We have seen him a couple of times since, but have only had fleeting glimpses as he still prefers to put his head into a bush when we arrive! We continue to collect valuable dung samples from him and look forward to getting results.

## Children Enjoy Elefun Camp by Simon Buckingham



After long discussions and lots of planning the 4<sup>th</sup> February saw the start of the first ever Elephants For Africa Elefun weekend. Elephants For Africa (EFA) has wanted to start working with the children of local communities for some time, but haven't had the funding to employ someone with the appropriate skills to liaise with the education department, schools and communities to turn this into reality. In 2010 we had the idea of approaching Children in the Wilderness (CITW), an existing non-profit organisation, who are already working with local schools and communities. Working together we developed the concept for the Elefun weekends and won the sponsorship from Elephant Back Safaris, Passage to Africa and Kavango Air.

Upon arrival we held a session where the children were asked to tell us what

### Su Lees, visiting artist

Back in 2007 I met Dr Kate Evans of the charity, Elephants For Africa (EFA) at the Bristol Festival Of Nature, in the UK; where we got talking about the Okavango Delta and our respective avenues of work. Being a wildlife artist it goes without saying that I have a keen and related interest in wildlife conservation and I have always strived to merge the two. As a result of our conversa-

tion Kate invited me out to see their research work in Botswana and planted the seed idea that I could get references and experiences which I could turn into an exhibition that could raise funds for their work. It wasn't the first time an artist has helped them in this way, but as much as I loved the idea of seeing and painting this incredible ecosystem for myself, I had serious doubts I could raise

the funds to go and stay there. but curiosity got the better of them when Cathy, the matriarch, stood there placidly. The mahouts explained some elephant physiology and also about how they have evolved to fill a role in the ecosystem. Before long all of the children wanted to have their photograph taken with her.

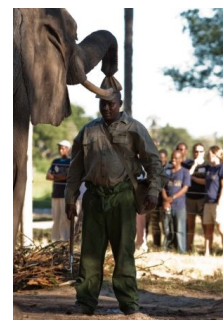
The children left with knowledge to make informed decisions about elephant, and we were left a little empty hearted as these children had made such an impression on us all in the short time they were with us.

This could not have been achieved without the talent of the CITW staff, the hard work of all the staff at Seba Camp and our sponsors, Elephant Back Safaris, Passage to Africa and Kavango Air.



Children watch Paseka being trained

**Many of these children's families are subsistence farmers and so crop raiding is a major issue in their areas.**



Kittismetsi and Colet

serious doubts I could raise

the funds to go and stay there.

It was a fabulous idea, but seemed out of my reach. The idea wouldn't go away and with great encouragement from Kate and my friends and family, how could I not try? It took me until late 2010 to get enough funds for a month long trip, but I am very happy to say that I am now here. I was very lucky and fortunate to have my em-

## Su Lees continued...



day in paradise. I am living very comfortably in one of the guest tents with a fabulous view out through my mesh windows across the Seba Lagoon to the Delta beyond. Frogs sing me to sleep, although for the first few nights they kept me awake because they are *so* loud. And as it is an unfenced camp all sorts of wildlife meanders through, so walking around, even in the daytime you have to keep your eyes and ears open. I have met or seen bushbuck, baboons, vervet monkeys, banded mongoose, impala, a hyena and an elephant (not to mention all the bird and insect life) either from my tent or as I have been around camp. I love to check out the animal tracks that have been left during the day or overnight and try to guess which animal made it and what they were doing at the time. At night I can watch fireflies flitting about outside my window and across the lagoon or watch the flashes of lightening colour and light the sky in a distant thunderstorm.

During the days around camp I either sit on my deck enjoying the view, do a bit of bird-spotting (there are so many to see), sketch and paint or wander round the pathways of the camp, doing pretty much the same thing – but always with a camera slung round my neck – because you never know what you will see or meet.

ployer, Bristol Zoo Gardens ([www.BristolZoo.org.uk](http://www.BristolZoo.org.uk)), award me a good sum of money towards my flights through their Staff Development Fund and a painting commissioned from a friend's dad on the proviso that the money *only* goes towards my 'Botswana Fund'. Without their help and the incredible generosity of Seba Camp management ([www.SebaCamp.com](http://www.SebaCamp.com)) in allowing me to stay so long and Kate for all her help in getting me here, I don't think I would have made it.

This trip and project is a dream come true for me. Firstly, to be in Africa with the greatest joy that I shall be in one place for the duration of my stay; not just a few days before dashing onto another camp/park/town. Which is what it

has been like on my previous trips to Africa, and although such trips had value in showing me as much as possible, I have always felt I just wanted to stay put somewhere and get better acquainted with what was around me and have time to breathe it in and soak up as many details as possible.

Secondly, this project is directly involved with wildlife conservation at the ground level. I have supported various conservation bodies/projects over the years, but it has always been 'at a distance'. This trip will give me the chance to see conservation research first-hand, spend time with the dedicated folks who carry out the research and make it their lives and to, hopefully, give back something to the world of wildlife knowing exactly where the support will go.

The experience of the Delta has surpassed my imagination even though several friends, who have been to various places in the Okavango, have told me how wonderful it is, building up my expectations as a consequence; I am still blown away by it.

Somehow getting up just before dawn here is a lot easier than at home, maybe it is because this is my kind of Heaven and I love every aspect of it and can't wait to enjoy another

**Lazzy, Su and Billy**



**Caption describing picture or graphic.**

I have been out on route drives with Kate, Charlie and Mphoeng and really love getting involved with elephant spotting and seeing the research side of things. I have also spent a couple of days sitting out in the bush with the elephants and mahouts of Abu Camp (www.AbuCamp.com), again sketching and taking photographs and drinking in every detail I can from around me, even down to the tiny ants running along decaying trees on the ground. Experiencing the bush in this way is invaluable with the insight and feel it gives me, so that I can then translate onto my paintings.

This morning I was painting the sunrise at 6.30 and an elephant walked by behind my tent, along the pathway! He'd been around all night - I heard him wading through the lagoon outside my tent last night and very early this morning when it was still dark, I heard him wading again, only this time it sounded *very* close. When I got up, inspired by the sunrise light to paint, I could see the channel he ploughed through the reeds right in front of my tent!!! Turns out it is Thando, one of EFA's collared elephants. On several of the route drives, we have gone out with the intention of tracking and getting

a focal and dung sample on him, but he's been elusive and then 'whaddaya know' - he's come to camp instead! Kate rushed out and got the samples and focal she needed from him, after he had moved out of camp.

I have done some sketching in pencil and pen and even done a watercolour sketch in the bush with a piece of grass because I had forgotten my brushes! The time I have spent with the Abu herd is honing my eye to the varying shapes and anatomy of elephants from 18 months old to just over 50 years old. I have brought some water-mixable oil colours with me to get some 'colour roughs' done. These are not finished paintings as such, but colour sketches - rather than rely on photographs, by painting whilst I am here I will get a better understanding of the colours of the landscape.

I fly home at the end of March to start Phase Two of the project- working towards the exhibition, which I hope to put on in the UK in a few years' time when I have painted a good body of work. I had lots of ideas for paintings before I came out; I've only been here a week, but already I am brimming over

with more painting ideas and I'm wondering how can I possibly paint them all!

As I type this I can hear vervet monkeys, a crested barbet, grey louries and tree squirrels making various calls in the trees and bushes near my tent. There's a dove calling and its call sounds like "Botswana, Botswana, Botswana". A dung beetle flies by with a heavy buzzing noise and dragonflies cruise the air currents looking for insects to snatch. This is definitely my kind of Heaven and I feel very privileged to play a part in conserving the Okavango Delta and its elephants.



Su, Joseph, Mphoeng and Charlie

## A year in the Delta by Charlie Ellis



Last April I flew for the first time, across the vastness of the Okavango Delta, to my home for the foreseeable future; Seba Camp, to begin as a research assistant for Elephants For Africa. At the time I of course had no idea

how the months ahead would pan out, but overwhelmed by the beauty I was seeing and awestruck by the prospect of what lay ahead, I knew that this would be a year to remember.

Having spent two years previously in a small remote camp in the Tuli Block, in the south of Botswana, I thought I knew this country and what the word wilderness meant. On my first night, failing to remember where to turn off to my tent, in the blanket of darkness and guided by my old and tired torch, hyenas crossing my path and elephant rumbles coming from the thick bush on either side, I realised that this was going to be different. This place is wild, and the Okavango Delta is truly one of the last wildernesses left on this earth.

My first months were dominated by the high level of water around, and the resulting intensity of elephant herds. Learning the processes and the lay of the land, I felt comfortable amongst this beautiful camp and its family of smile adorned people quickly, but it took me some months to slow down and learn to let the bush do the rest for me. Routine here is dictated by nature in its truest form; that of light, water and heat. We rise early, as the sun is coming up, and are generally in the field until it gets too hot. Where we can go depends on the level of the flood, as many roads get engulfed by water, and although our snorkel-equipped vehicle can cope in theory, the mechanics don't always agree that we should drive through the deepest crossings, drenching the electronics and taking toll on yet another newly replaced starter motor! When the rain comes, this brings a whole new myriad of challenges and sticky roads. Evenings in the bush are best spent under the stars, but once the sun goes down it usually doesn't take too long for us to head for bed, to listen to the night sounds from our tents, preparing for tomorrow to unfold all over again at first

light.

In June last year, as the winter approached, Kate and Sim headed to the UK for marriage preparations and the EFA infield reigns were left in the hands of Mphoeng and myself. The elephant numbers decreased slowly, the number of individuals that I could identify off the top of my head grew as I got my 'eye in', my knowledge of the area grew with the friendships I was making with those who I spent my life with, the days got chilly and the nights freezing cold.

Mphoeng and I were blessed by one of my most memorable lion encounters to date. As we drove to the elephant boma on a bitter Saturday



morning, a little bit groggy from a camp birthday party the night before, we came across a huge male lion lying where the airstrip and road meet. As our headlights faded into the light emerging from the horizon, we sat and watched him as he turned his head to the side, projecting a profile I still see as clear as day in my mind, opened his mouth so wide, and let out a series of guttural roars. I didn't so much hear this sound, as felt it through every element of my body. It resonated and reverberated, leaving me smiling from ear to ear, and any trace from the night before vanished!

My first Delta leopard also came around these months, along with my growing experience of the adrenaline filled encounter that is an elephant bull in full musth. The number of musth bulls around caused me to take to singing the slightly amended version of that classic Wet Wet Wet song, 'Musth is all around'! I soon came to realise that bulls in this state are not (always!) the unpredictable fiends that they are made out to be, but that watching those powerful hormones do their job for these competing males, is as fascinating as it is humbling.

The climax of the winter came with the winds travelling north across the Kalahari Desert, with the feeling that their sole intention was to target me in my tent and cause me to walk around as a wrapped up shivering wreck for a number of days. Getting stuck in deep water is, I soon found out, less than fun on these wintry mornings, as it is in the heat of a summer's day.

The flood receded and the flocks of open-billed storks, sometimes near one hundred strong, swarmed the waters' edges in search of newly beached crustaceans. Mthondo, the most recent elephant to be released to the wild here from the Elephant Back Safaris herd, turned up outside of camp one September day, changing the course of my months ahead by his choice in coming back. I spent on average six hours a day monitoring him for valuable data and making sure he kept

out of trouble; of which there wasn't any.

Spending this intense time with him, and out in the bush lying on the back of the vehicle monitoring the signal from his radio collar across an impassable flood plain, listening to the sounds of the birds and feeling the bush's power invigorate and inspire me, is one of the most memorable periods for me over the past year.

The short dry season in this environment of honoured abundant water



**Mthondo**

brought a peak of happiness and celebration, with its partner of a low of sadness and sorrow. Kate and Sim's second wedding here in the bush was a day for all to remember. The festivity was palpable; with the backdrop of a sunset to rival years of African sunsets, turning to a sky of stars sparkling overhead.

A month later saw the flipside of the rawness of the bush, where emotions have nowhere to hide and can leave you flying high, as quickly as falling fast. A tragic accident led to the death of a dear friend and colleague; but the warmth of this community of phenomenal individuals, along with I believe the innate healing power of this beautiful land, allowed



**Baby Impala**

our lives to slowly move onwards and upwards, in our own individual ways, together.

As the calendar year drew towards a close, the heat returned with abundance and we all prayed for rain. The baron bush acted as tinder to the flailing bush fires and leadwood trees smouldered for weeks afterwards amongst the blackened earth. The rain did come, of course, and



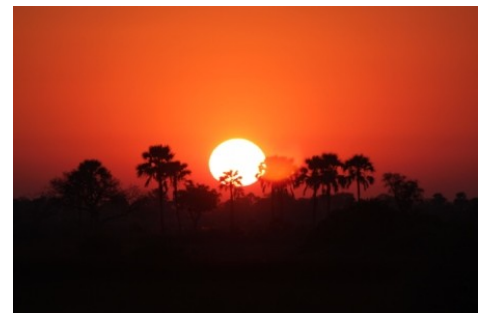
**Charlie tracking**

the burnt ground turned to a meadow of green shoots in days. Our eyes adjusted to the tall grass and leafed trees hiding their inhabitants, making even elephants difficult to spot. The rains were kind, the bush flourished and the babies arrived. Seeing ones' first baby impala of the season is a momentous event; causing us to stop and admire once again the beauty of this overlooked animal. The females amongst us feel the power of those hormones too at baby time!

My year now closes; in some ways as it began, but in others so different. The flood has returned and we await that intensity of elephants to grow to bursting point again. The hyenas are still around camp and the lions can be heard on nights in the distance. The wild flowers dapple the green grass, the hippos grunt and roam, and the baboons and monkeys squeal and fight. The eagles soar high, the frogs call in the darkness and the dragonflies mate in flight. The bush continues to stir wonder and awe. I am privileged to have lived this complete cycle in the fullest possible sense and for how the Delta has shaped my every living minute of this past year.

"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." Anon.

**Open billed storks**



# easyfundraising .org.uk

Elephants For Africa has signed up with EasyFundraising.org to make donating to charity a whole lot easier AND it does not cost you a penny. Easyfundraising.org.uk provide a FREE service where you can shop with your favourite online stores and at no extra cost raise funds for Elephants For Africa. You still shop directly with each retailer as you would normally, but simply by using the links from the Easy Fundraising site first, each purchase you make will generate a cashback donation to Elephants For Africa.

For example, spend £25 with WHSmith on Books and 2.5% will be donated. You will have raised £0.63, at no extra cost to your purchase. Make any purchase from Amazon and 2.5% will be donated.

You can shop with 2000+ Brand Name retailers and to raise funds you just use the links from our site first - it's that simple!

If you ALREADY shop online, why not help good causes at no extra cost from purchases you would make anyway. To support us in this way, simply go to [www.easyfundraising.org.uk/support-a-cause](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/support-a-cause) select Elephants For Africa as your cause.

## Su Lees limited edition print for sale

As you may have read earlier, Su Lees is currently visiting the research and she is busy sketching, painting and taking photos of everything she sees. She has an exceptional eye for detail and I am very excited about the work she will create, given the sketches and paintings I have so far been privileged to see.

As well as visiting us to gather material for a future exhibition in aid of Elephants For Africa, Sue has kindly donated 10 limited edition prints of a beautiful oil painting she did after a visit to Amboseli National Park in Kenya (see below).

We have 10 to sell with 100% of the proceeds going to our research and education projects.

They measure 37.5 x 94cm and cost £150+ £10p&p.

Please email [order@elephantsforafrica.org](mailto:order@elephantsforafrica.org) to reserve your print.



## Contact details

Elephants For Africa  
Private Bag 332Maun  
Botswana

[Info@ElephantsForAfrica.org](mailto:Info@ElephantsForAfrica.org)

[www.ElephantsForAfrica.org](http://www.ElephantsForAfrica.org)

