

Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter Issue 17



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August 2012
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Welcome by Dr Kate Evans

Kate with the chief of Moreomaoto



In March this year, we moved EfA's camp from the Okavango Delta to the Makgadikgadi National Park which is alongside the Boteti River.

We have been made to feel very welcome by the staff and owners of SKL Camps as well as the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, in particular by Mr Gwapela and Mr Phologo.

We would also like to thank Columbus Zoo and Aquarium; their conservation grant has enabled us to purchase the tents that we now call home.

As soon as we had set up camp, we were welcoming Andrew Smith from Memphis Zoo and Dr Ricardo Stanoss from the Chicago Zoological Society. Both of them were visiting EfA because their institutions fund our work.

Having travelled all my life, it is always exciting to experience new places, and when elephants are involved, it is even more exciting to find out who is around. So far, we have not seen any old friends from the delta, however I would not be surprised if that happens soon.

The elephants' social setup here is very different; there are currently no females and we are seeing slightly larger groups of male elephants.

Unlike in the delta where we had to get up at 5.30am to see the elephants in the cool early hours, here they come down to the river later in the morning when it is hot. At this time, they enjoy munching on acacia fruit and hanging out in the shade of the large trees before going down to the water to drink and bathe.

The Boteti River signifies the boundary of the National Park, and on the opposite riverbank there are a number of villages. In May we had the pleasure of living in one of these villages where we held the first Cycle of Enquiry workshop. This was run by EfA together with Ricardo Stanoss.

On this course we were teaching informal educators (such as scout leaders and club leaders) on how to engage children in the environment outside of the classroom. This was quickly followed by an "Elephun" weekend. This involves taking local children into the national park to help them experience and appreciate their local wildlife.

Our big news for this quarter, is that Mphoeng Ofithile, has successfully completed his Masters of Science degree at the University of Bristol. He is our first student and we are all incredibly proud of his achievement.

Masters Degree for Scholarship Student by Dr Kate Evans



We are delighted and proud to announce that Mphoeng Ofithile, our first Boyce-Zero Scholarship student, has successfully defended his Masters thesis in an oral exam at the University of Bristol.

CONGRATULATIONS Mphoeng.

Mphoeng joined *Elephants for Africa* in 2008 and developed his Masters plan after learning the ropes and understanding what area of research would be of most interest to him.

He has grown to become a very important part of our team and when he returned to Botswana in July he began leading our new project on male elephant ecology on the Boteti River.

Through this research, we hope to understand more about the human-elephant conflict issue which has such devastating consequences for elephants and the local people.

The Boyce-Zero Scholarship program was started by *Elephants for Africa* in memory of two passionate conservationists who gave their all to Botswana and its wildlife.

The scholarship is aimed at helping local Motswanan conservationists develop their careers.



Donation to Moreomaoto Library



Neo and Golang are the wonderful librarians at Moreomaoto Village Library. They work tirelessly to make the library available to the village for reading, learning and workshops on cooking and gardening.

We have just held our first (of hopefully many) Cycle of Enquiry Workshops for environmental educators. This was achieved alongside our great friend and colleague Dr Ricardo Stanoss of Chicago Zoological Society, and the librarians helped us to organise this with the village.

Whilst we were unpacking our camp I came across many novels and reference books that we now have little need for and so I decided to donate them to the library. Novels are one area that they were lacking in, so they were very pleased to get them.

The Motswanans love paperwork so I am busy collecting the required documentation to permit me to become a member. They have some great craft books there that I am eager to read.



Jubilant Elephants

2012 is a year of celebration for the UK with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympic Games. In keeping with the spirit of celebration, *Elephants for Africa* have made these special Jubilant Elephant badges to help raise money for the charity.

For just £2 plus £1 P&P within the UK* you can be the proud owner of a Jubilant Elephant.

Elephant Facts:

Since Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1952 we have lost an estimated 871,000 - 4,530,000 (65-90%) African elephants.

Since the modern day olympics started in 1896, we have lost between 6,530,000 - 9,530,000 (93-95%) of the world's African elephants.



Today there is only an estimated 470,000 African elephants. We are currently losing 100-200 per day to the illegal ivory trade.

*Additional postal charges may apply for supporters outside of the UK

Memphis Zoo Visit Botswana

by Andrew Smith



Two weeks in the bush... in a tent... with no hot water... and no electricity! Are you kidding? Those could have been some of the best days of my life.

I am the elephant manager at Memphis Zoo and a board member of the Elephant Managers Association. After several years of procrastinating over a complicated grant proposal to Memphis Zoo's Conservation Action Network (CAN), I finally got the extra shove from my wife to finish it. Fortunately, our zoo is very supportive of our elephant program and its conservation message, so my proposal was fully funded.

In May I got the opportunity to visit Kate and EfA's camp. In addition to covering my travel expenses to observe and assist in their research, the grant included purchasing two iPod Touches, a handheld GPS unit with a handful of accessories for both, and the funding to pay for a research assistant's salary for five months. After almost twenty years in the business of elephant management, this was my first opportunity to see an African elephant in the wild.

Kate and Mphoeng were unbelievable hosts. They were organised, prepared and very welcoming upon my arrival in Maun. I couldn't wait for my first glimpse of a big bull elephant. After a short drive to the camp, we unpacked, made some dinner, and I slept in preparation for the next ten days of tracking elephants.

During my stay we saw over 30 different bulls of various sizes and ages. Some were very stoic and wise with their age and a few were young punks looking for trouble. We certainly had our fair share of exciting moments. We also had some very peaceful ones.

Upon returning to camp in the late afternoon, we were kept busy organising a relatively new office, entering data, identifying elephants, and processing the day's faecal collections. If we were lucky, we would finish in time to take a cold shower in the daylight to avoid holding a torch ("flashlight" for us Americans) while scrubbing the sweat and dirt off.

The evenings in camp were always enjoyable. Mphoeng and I prepped the food, Kate did the cooking, and then Mphoeng and I were back in action "washing up." Afterwards we were busy story-telling, playing heated games of UNO (following "British" rules!), or watching a movie on a laptop and hoping the battery would last to the end.

I learnt a lot from Kate and Mphoeng. I hope they learnt something from me. Field research can benefit from zoological institutions just as much as the institutions benefit from field research. That is the great thing about having a symbiotic relationship like this.

The great news is that this project will continue to receive support from CAN this year, as well. Amanda Hadicke - one of our elephant keepers - applied for another grant and is very excited to get the opportunity to visit their camp. It is great that Memphis Zoo can play an active role in African elephant conservation projects.

I appreciate all the hard work and effort that Kate and her staff put into their work. They certainly made an impression on me. I look forward to a long and productive relationship between Memphis Zoo and *Elephants for Africa*.

Elephun Weekend by Ricardo Stanoss



After a hard week of learning during the Circle of Enquiry workshop, we were able to put our new knowledge to good use during the first Elephun weekend in May.

It was attended by twelve children from the local primary school's environmental club. The EfA staff, together with the adults who participated in the enquiry training and some local safari guides, offered two days of hands-on, participatory play and learning in the Makgadikgadi National Park.

This was the first time that the children and adults from the local village had visited the park. Despite its proximity, they consider it inaccessible to them due to needing a 4x4 vehicle and the cost of the river ferry and park entry fees (the Department of Wildlife and National Parks waived all entrance fees for the two days).

The kids were excited before the weekend, but they didn't know what to expect. Travelling in the Toyota Land Cruisers for 43km was exciting in itself. And crossing the river in a ferry that barely accommodated the truck was also a thrilling adventure.

Once in the park, we asked the children to help the staff gather data to answer the following question: "how do the types and numbers of animals vary next to the river and away from the river?" They gathered data on the species observed, the numbers of individuals, and the tracks found on the sandy soil. Then it was lunchtime and group discussions abounded. At the end of the day, the students presented their findings to the park's staff member

who dedicated time to interpreting the findings and have a conversation with the children.

On Sunday, the kids turned up 30 minutes earlier than required; a sure sign they had enjoyed themselves. The next activity was to compare the sounds in the bush by the village and the sounds in the river. But they enjoyed the previous day's enquiry so much that they continued gathering data on animals by the river.

The two local safari guides assisting us deserve a special mention. They understood that they are role models to these children and interpreted the entire experience in Setswana (the local language). The tour guides and park staff also presented the children with potential career opportunities in tourism and conservation.

This weekend represented a new experience for these local people. It starkly contrasts with their normal activities and their first-hand experience of wildlife, especially elephants. They learned new skills, such as: identifying evidence of elephant presence; tracking elephants; exploring interactions with elephants; discussing elephants' relationships with humans; and reflecting as a group on how they relate to elephants and wildlife.



Memphis Zoo Supports Elephants for Africa by Amanda Hadicke



Every year, the Conservation Action Network (CAN) in conjunction with Memphis Zoo, offers grant opportunities to support research and conservation.

This collaboration proudly promotes the conservation of wildlife and their natural habitats. "Through conservation research, a greater understanding of ecological processes and the planet's biodiversity will occur, leading to more effective management of our natural resources and remaining wildlife." (CAN)

After speaking with Kate Evans about the current work being done by *Elephants for Africa*, I drafted a grant proposal that would help to support their research on African elephants. So, I am pleased to announce that we will once again be supporting this charity.

This grant will supply EfA with infrared digital game cameras and corresponding accessories, that will aid their work in monitoring the elephants within the Makgadikgadi Pans.

The grant also provides the opportunity for me to directly participate in the programme as a research volunteer with Kate and her team in Botswana. I am extremely grateful to have such an opportunity.

The knowledge I will gain through the observation of wild elephant behavior as well as all the practical aspects of elephant research, will be an invaluable asset to me. Having a greater understanding of natural elephant behavior, would positively influence the care I am able to provide to the three African elephants that call Memphis Zoo home.

Elephants in zoos ultimately serve as the ambassadors for their wild counterparts. Through inspiring and educating people about the importance of elephant conservation, we are better able to support the continued survival of the wild elephant populations. Through the sharing of my own experiences, I hope I may serve to benefit elephants by educating and instilling passion for conservation in our society.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Nelson Mandela

Cycle of Enquiry Workshop by Kate Evans

Ricardo teaching



This workshop has been designed to train local educators to be better at enabling children to learn about nature. There were 14 people attending, who were from all over Botswana.

These informal education and community officers represent key partners and NGOs who are already working or planning to work in Moreomaoto and across Botswana.

Some participants represented organisations of national significance, such as the Botswana Department of Wildlife & National Parks.

In Botswana, it is common to teach in a traditional rote learning style. However, on this course we aim to encourage educators to teach children basic scientific principles which they can then apply to their own simple experiments. This then promotes independent, critical thinking.

We camped in the heart of Moreomaoto village, so we were often joined by villagers during the day or in the evenings. We were honoured that Michael Masheto (the village chief) was very involved.

Chief Masheto took time from his busy agenda to attend the first day of the workshop and then visit the group every day. He welcomed the participants and demonstrated genuine interest in this opportunity to build knowledge that was being hosted in his community.

On the last day of the workshop, *Elephants for Africa* invited him for a farewell dinner, and he reinstated his commitment to continuing this collaboration.



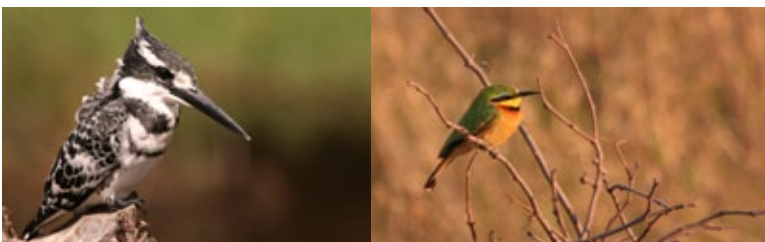


Special thanks go to:

- Steve Stockall www.eartharkbotswana.com for donating his book: *A Photographic Safari through Northern Botswana*
This will soon be available to buy through our website or email us if you interested.
- Lesley Woods, for continued sales of her beautiful elephant print:
<http://wildearthfineart.com/buy-prints>
- The Conservation Endowment Fund for funding the Cycle of Enquiry Workshop and Elephun weekend
- The Chicago Board of Trade, for funding the Elephun weekends
- Memphis Zoo for their continued support
- The Wilderness Trust for their donation
- Tigress Production for their donation
- The Chicago Zoological society for their continued support

We would also like to thank our individual donors:

- Michelle Field-Chez
- John & Martha Graham
- Michael Fripp



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