

Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter Issue 16



Dr Kate Evans
22 Claremont Road
Bishopston
Bristol BS7 8DQ

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Registered Charity no. 1122027
www.elephantsforafrica.org
info@elephantsforafrica.org

Welcome by Dr Kate Evans

On 1st of February 2012, I celebrated 10 years of being an elephant researcher and a decade spent in the delta.

This huge milestone could not have been achieved without the support and encouragement of many people. Those who donate their time, energy, talent or funds are the team that makes Elephants for Africa and I would like to say a very special thank you to everyone.

There have been many changes ecologically throughout the delta. I came here in 2002 when it was going through the dry phase; now the floodwaters are much higher as we enter a predicted ten-year wet phase.

With these dramatic physical changes, the animals that live here are having to adapt quite rapidly. Many of the larger mammals are migrating outside of the protected areas and coming into conflict with man. It is this movement and re-establishment of old home ranges that we have chosen to study next because it is really important, not just for Botswana now, but for the future conservation of elephants as we deal with climate change.

At the end of February I packed up camp - my home for the past 10 years - and in May will be relocating down to the Makgadikgadi Pans, where there has been a dramatic influx of male elephants.

Male elephants are the core of our research and so this area offers a wonderful opportunity to further our understanding of the largest land mammal and their social and ecological requirements.

Other changes are in technology. When I first arrived here my only connection with the outside world was through radio to Maun and snail mail to loved ones. Now I am able to keep in touch with the scientific world and talk to my family through our sponsored satellite internet (many thanks to the Tauenbaum's).

2012 will also see Elephants for Africa actually become Elephants for Africa. Until now, we have focused on the elephant population in Botswana.



Simon and Kate in Botswana

Whilst this will remain our core project, we are expanding outside of Botswana to take on students in South Africa and Ethiopia. Both students got in contact to see if their projects would be of interest to us.

So in autumn 2011, I visited their projects and am proud to say that Lisa Howard and Sintayehu Dejene have partnered with us and will be starting their PhDs soon.

In Botswana, we welcome Lydia Baines to the team as she completes her Masters on the parasitology of elephant and other large ungulates in the Okavango Delta.

After visiting South Africa and Ethiopia, I travelled to America to visit our sponsors: Dallas Zoo, Memphis Zoo and the Chicago Zoological Society.

Whilst in Chicago it was a huge honour to receive the George B Rabb Conservation Medal. That evening was one that I, and my husband Sim, will remember for a very long time.

The George B Rabb Conservation Medal by Dr Kate Evans



Kate with awardees - Mr & Mrs Keller and Dr Stuart Stahl

It had been a particularly difficult day in camp, when I sat down in the evening to check my emails.

Amongst them was one from Dr Grajal of the Chicago Zoological society; I read it and then re-read it and read it again before leaping around the place with joy, shouting "we have won an award!".

The camp managers and researchers were a little stunned and it took them a good five minutes to calm me down before I could articulate what all the fuss was about. My husband Simon was in Maun, dog-sitting for friends, but I managed to get hold of him to tell him the good news.

We then had to keep quiet about it until it was officially announced.

Our annual visit to Chicago was more special than usual because their Conservation Leadership Awards dinner on 2nd November 2011 was when I accepted the award on behalf of Elephants for Africa.

It was quite an event and it was a little odd for Simon and I to be the centre of attention.

International recognition such as this has done wonders for the EfA team; it has revitalised our energy and determination to carry on with our mission and vision.



Kate receiving her award from Barbara Levy Kipper

Paper Accepted for Publication

Kate, together with Professor Stephen Harris at Bristol University, has just had another paper accepted for publication in the African Journal of Ecology.

The paper is titled: "Sex differences in habitat use by African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) in the Okavango Delta, Botswana: is size really the deciding factor?"

Please let us know if you would like to receive a copy when it comes out and we will email it through to you.



"Into the Wild"

In December, Kate met Jack Hanna - a famous American conservationist and TV presenter - whilst he was filming in Botswana. This was for a forth-coming episode of his *Into the Wild* series, which will be shown in the USA either in April or September. Please keep an eye on their website for more details: <http://www.jhitw.com>.

The filming took place in Khwai and the river lodge took wonderful care of us all whilst we were there: www.khwairiverlodge.com.

We had three amazing leopard sightings, which was a real treat for me, as well as some wonderful large bull elephants.

We also discussed the urgent conservation issues facing the African elephant and the sudden rise in poaching here.

Thank you to Jack and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium who made a generous donation to Elephants for Africa.



Conserving the Last Elephants in the Horn of Africa by Sintayehu Dejene



Sintayehu Dejene

I am an Ethiopian PhD student with a passion for conservation. I graduated with an MSc in Biology (Biodiversity, Wildlife Ecology and Conservation) from Addis Ababa University in 2009.

I currently work as lecturer and researcher at Haramaya University. My PhD is titled: "The Ecology of African Elephant: its Implications for Conservation of the species and their Wider Habitat in Babile Elephant Sanctuary (BES), Ethiopia".

BES is one of the protected areas in Ethiopia, established in 1970, to conserve the only elephant population in the Horn of Africa. These elephants have been separated from other populations in Ethiopia for more than eight decades.

Due to an influx of a large number of farmers and their livestock, the home range of the elephants in BES has shrunk by 65%. Recently 100km² in the northern part of the sanctuary has been given to a private company engaged in the production of biofuel.

Local communities around the area are dependent on the vegetation for fencing, medicine, construction and fuel from the sanctuary.

So, this area's conservation issues are complex.

My proposed project will have both scientific and conservation goals. Detailed studies are urgently needed on the elephants here, to determine the population and its importance to the ecological communities of the area.

Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC) is very high in this area; it affects people's livelihoods as well as the elephants themselves, so this project will work with the communities towards human-wildlife coexistence.

Today, the sanctuary has limited protection from the law because it is not a national park. By becoming a national park, BES would be allocated a higher budget to enable the anti-poaching team to better carry out their work.

We are working with Elephant for Africa, to provide good scientific data which will help upgrade BES to a national park.



Kate with Sintayehu in Ethiopia

Elephant Welfare in South Africa

by Lisa Howard



After my degree, I travelled out to South Africa and assisted research programmes on game reserves. One project focussed on elephant behaviour - this is where interest turned into ambition. Whilst in Africa I was able to visit a large number of reserves, research stations and wildlife centres across nine Southern and East African countries. This experience cemented my passion for African elephants.

After completing an MSc in animal behaviour, I was back in South Africa, carrying out a short welfare project on a group of semi-captive elephants for the new African Elephant Research Unit (AERU). This resulted in the creation of an enrichment program. From this, ideas for a more extensive project grew. I contacted Kate after attending her talk at the Compassionate Conservation Conference.

My PhD aims to examine the more subtle and unexplored aspects of elephant behaviour, and to use this knowledge to improve their welfare in captivity. Behaviour such as trunk-twisting, foot-swinging and touching various parts of their face, mouth or temporal gland with their trunks are known as displacement behaviours. These are often

noted by researchers, but are not fully understood.

Understanding stress is essential to any management strategy. However, most indicators of welfare rely on expensive, slow methods such as testing urine for stress hormones. This study aims to validate this behaviour as a way of identifying stress in a non-invasive and scientific manner. This will be done by observing behaviour and collecting urine or dung samples during different levels of tourism, and with different handling methods.

This will help to establish the first scientific data for captive elephants in South Africa, and clarify links between hormone levels reflected in dung, urine and even saliva. The project also looks into the GnRH vaccine (chemical castration) which is increasingly used on 'problem' bulls, despite there being very little research on the behavioural impact of this. My conclusions will also enable managers to better understand the behavioural impact of relocating elephants, (difficulties occur with the cohesion of the new group/those left behind). The overall goal of my research is to help the elephant handlers improve the welfare of the elephants in their care, as well as their own safety.

Elephant Interactions

by Danielle Spitzer



It's so nice to be back in camp after a long, relaxing trip back home to Alabama for Christmas. As we flew over the delta, I was quite surprised by how much it had dried up during the time I was gone. I didn't see any wildlife from the plane, but as we got closer to camp I saw a small herd of elephants and knew I was back.

Since returning, there have not been many elephant sightings around the area, but I did find a young bull the other day that was very hesitant and unsure about my presence. After he calmed down and realised he was not in any danger, he came closer to the vehicle to investigate. Shortly afterwards, he moved away by walking backwards, making sure to keep his eye fixed on me. In all the time I have spent monitoring elephants, I have never seen an elephant walk backwards and found this very entertaining.

I have also enjoyed meeting the newest member of the Abu herd: Warona. She is very sweet and energetic. One afternoon, one of the elephant handlers pushed Warona over and tickled her. I quickly joined in and loved the unique opportunity of such an amazing interaction with a baby elephant. I laughed as she struggled to get back

on her feet and run away. Warona soon got her own back though. When I had turned my focus on to a different elephant for just a few seconds, she came straight at me. She head-butted my legs and knocked me off my feet! I still cannot believe how strong baby elephants are at such a young age.

One day, when I was heading back to camp after our morning research drive, we came across the elephant we call Earl Grey. This 25 year old bull elephant seems to like being around camp and sleeps near one of our tents. It was nice to see that he was in such great condition and we were happy that he is back in the area after some time away.



The Amazing World of Animal Poo

by Lydia Baines



I am in Botswana for three months looking at parasites that live within elephants based in the delta, for my MSc at Bristol University. I have been collecting dung samples from wild elephants, the Abu herd, and grazing mammals, such as zebra and buffalo, that share their pastures.

The main aim of my project is to investigate the factors that affect the quantity of intestinal worms in elephants, and to see whether elephants are sharing parasite species with the livestock that live off the same land. If such a transmission is occurring, it could have important implications for wildlife-livestock conflict.

For each sample, the age, sex, condition, location and group size is recorded, and for each grazer, the age and sex is noted. The samples are then taken to a laboratory, where I use a microscope to investigate which parasites are present and how many.

So far, I have had some very interesting results, and it appears that the elephants and other mammals (including zebra, wildebeest, buffalo, impala, reedbuck and giraffe) are infected by the same species of parasite. We are also collecting hormone samples; it will be very interesting to see if hormone levels have an affect on the species of parasite.

Every day I join Kate and Danielle on their drives, which gives me an opportunity to collect samples. Most of the animals have been fairly obliging in giving their donations.

Collecting samples from the Abu herd is an absolute pleasure, aided by the presence of Warona, the baby elephant. She is playful, and her mother is very relaxed when we interact with her. It is very amusing to be walking with such a big and beautiful herd to the sound of the handlers shouting "poo Abu, poo!". Collecting samples gives me an opportunity to get out into the bush and see some of the other wildlife that is around.

A couple of days ago, we saw a group of banded mongoose and their offspring. We managed to get a close look at the newborn babies, before the mums responded to their amazingly loud calls, by picking them up in their mouths and scampering off. We have also been having frequent visits from a spotted bush snake, which seems to be very interested in our activities.



Banded Mongoose



Visiting Snake



Special thanks go to:

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- Dallas Zoo
- Chicago Zoological Society
- Jack Hanna and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

We would also like to thank our individual donors:

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- Wilmar Schmit & Peter Schmit
- Lis Meeker
- Molly Leight

How to donate:

Should you wish to make a donation, we have a range of options available:

You can go through Just Giving by visiting - <http://www.justgiving.com/elephantsforafrica>

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Elephants for Africa

Dr Kate Evans
22 Claremont Road
Bishopston
Bristol BS7 8DQ



Equipment donated by
Memphis Zoo



A group of elephants that Lisa Howard is
studying in South Africa