

Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter Issue 21



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Welcome by Dr Kate Evans



Our team has had a busy start this year with the arrival of James Stevens in camp. He is starting his PhD on human-elephant conflict in this area. He visited camp last year and then returned to Bristol University to set up his PhD, then made a swift turnaround to get back in time for the crop-raiding season. His blue 4x4 has arrived from the UK so we can now find him visiting farmers' fields as well as in the national park. With the coming of the rains a lot has changed since he was last in camp and you can read about that in his update from the field.

Josephine Walker, another of our PhD students, is also busy visiting the farmers, but is focusing on their livestock rather than their crops and has been busy training the farmers in the area.

The communities they work with are also the focus of our education program 'Conservation Leadership for Youth' and we are busy preparing for a workshop to train environmental educators.

Meanwhile, Mphoeng has been giving talks in Khumaga to the environmental club at the local primary school. It currently does not have electricity and so we all went over, armed with four laptops, so the children could see the presentation he had made. We run a schools link (where schools in wealthier countries are linked to schools in our area) and we hope that this will help improve the facilities for these enthusiastic learners.

Mphoeng has been busy welcoming his new daughter into the world, but he is now back in camp and has written about the Botswana people's relationship with animals.

This relationship is paramount in the long-term conservation of Africa's wildlife and our holistic approach to elephant conservation embraces both the interests of the animals and the humans living in the area.

I would also like to introduce you to two additional team members. Dr Emily Bennitt joined us at the beginning of the year having completed her PhD on buffalo in the Okavango Delta with the University of Bristol.

She brings a wealth of knowledge on the ecology of Botswana, a logical and data-driven mind and a passion for grasses; perfect for working with the largest land herbivores in the world.

She has taken up the post of research coordinator and will assist Mphoeng with running the project in Botswana. Emily has already made vast improvements, I am very excited about working with her and developing our research program to address the issues in the area.

Charlie Ellis has joined us as logistics manager to make life easier and more productive for our researchers in the field. In addition, she is helping to coordinate and expand our education programs. Some of you may remember her; Charlie was a volunteer with us when we were based in the delta, so it seems that the big grey fellas are hard to resist.

As for the elephants, they are busy enjoying the lush grasses (and crops) that the good rains have brought, and stocking up for the dry season ahead.

Visit to the USA by Kate Evans



As always America welcomed me with open arms on my trip back in October, when I visited supporters and gave lectures. My first stop was at the Dallas Zoo and the Elephant Managers Association, where I brought them up-to-date with the situation in Africa.

It was a fleeting visit but it gave me the opportunity to meet up with old friends and make new ones. EfA supporter Amanda Hadicke and I flew together to Memphis for the second Art for Elephants fundraiser. It was a wonderful evening hosted in the Memphis Zoo's magnificent lodge, which gave me a taste of the American wilderness.

The event was a huge success and raised much-needed funds for our work. It would not have been such a success without the hard work of Amanda and many of the zoo team that gave up their time, the support of the zoo's director Chuck Brady and of course the artists themselves who donated their work. We would like to say a special thank you to them for their kind and generous donations.

- Tara Darby
- Rick Stewart
- Jan Geiss
- Gaven Trinidad
- Ben Waddams waddamsfineart.webs.com
- Hillary Butler

- Dorothy Collier
- Brittney Boyd
- Jamond Bullock
- James Jalenak
- Matt Dawson www.matt-dawson.co.uk

My last stop was the Chicago Zoological Society where I spent a busy week working on strengthening this partnership. Their expertise in environmental education is a great help as we grow and develop our education program in Botswana and many plans were discussed on how to make this bigger and better. Whilst there I was honoured to give a talk as part of their lecture series, which was very well attended.



Ancient Tribal Traditions by Mphoeng Ofithile



Botswana has traditionally been a flagship for conservation on the African continent and the country must be commended for its efforts. The people of Botswana (who are referred to as Batswana) are made up of many different tribes living harmoniously together.

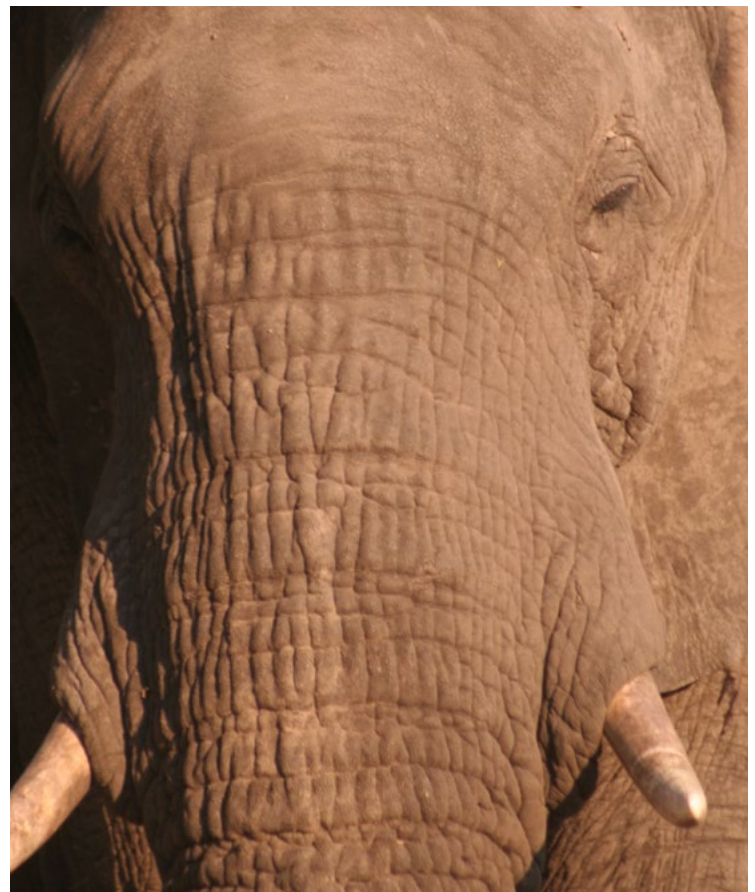
The Tswana people have strong principles that have helped in the conservation of Botswana's flora and fauna, throughout this vast and beautiful land. Each tribe has a chief; they run the tribe and resolve conflicts to ensure continued unity.

In ancient times, these chiefs worked to preserve the environment and even now they still play a significant role. Each tribe has a totem, which is a sacred animal. In forthcoming newsletters I shall explain many different tribes' totems.

The Bakalanga tribe's totem is an elephant. The totem of a tribe is the most respected and would never be killed by the tribe. The people are not even keen to step on the tracks of their species. This along with the Botswana government's efforts in conservation has seen this country become the last strong hold of the elephant.

However, despite our reverence for nature, many myths about certain species have been generated and I shall be exploring the more negative aspects of our traditions.

Sharing my knowledge of our ancestral conservation efforts makes me proud. These are the cultural principles that are bestowed on Botswana's people, which we pass on to our children. A nation without cultural principles is destined for disaster.



Human-Elephant Conflict Study by James Stevens



I have been back in camp for over a month now and it's great to be here and starting my own project on the boundary of the national park. Much has changed now that the rains have started. In October it was a vast area of sand and dry vegetation. Now that the rains have arrived, you can barely see the sand through the sea of grass. Even the large elephants remain hidden until you drive past the bush that they are browsing on, resulting in a shock for both parties.

All the fresh vegetation means that the wildlife is looking much healthier with young impala bouncing around all over the place. Everything seems to have a spring in its step compared to October when the animals walked, with their heads down, to the river and back in a desperate attempt to survive.

It has been lovely to recognise a few elephants from last year that have all put on some nice Christmas weight. There appears to be more musth bulls here at the moment which keeps us on our toes. Musth is a period in adult male elephants where their temporal glands become swollen and a strong smelling fluid runs down their cheeks. With high levels of testosterone pumping through their bodies, they can become aggressive so when observing these elephants it is important to be even more alert.

Since arriving back in Botswana I have picked up my vehicle which was shipped from the UK but I have yet to test it in the bush. It needs fine tuning for the rough terrain – it's a slightly

different habitat from the streets of Britain. I have also employed an assistant from a local village to help me with translations within the community. Mankind has been a great find; not only is he a farmer but he used to work for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) as a game scout. He has been worth his weight in gold with all his help and insight.

Having visited the farmers' fields after an elephant raided their crops, it is apparent that this is a huge issue in this region. I have visited one farmer now that has had an elephant go through his field four nights in a row. The elephant seems to be interested in the watermelons, however with such a large animal passing through, a lot of damage is carried out through trampling.

The defences that the farmer has put in place are minimal and do not appear to be effective. By investigating why this field and others are targeted more by the elephants, we hope to observe patterns of behaviour. This will be useful in making recommendations to the DWNP about how to reduce the conflict in this region. Gaining a better understanding of these elephants will aid us in finding out why they are leaving the protection of the national park to carry out the risky behaviour of crop raiding.

With the communities keen to be involved in this project I am excited about making living alongside elephants more bearable for the local people who rely on these precious crops to feed their families.

Dr Emily Bennett Joins EfA



While I was doing my PhD on African buffalo in Botswana, I visited the Makgadikgadi National Park, but did not have a thorough understanding of the ecosystem there. So when the opportunity to work as a research coordinator for *Elephants for Africa* presented itself, I jumped at the chance.

This is a very different ecosystem to the one in the Okavango Delta, where I completed my fieldwork. The majority of the park is pretty dry but this is offset by the lush floodplains on the Boteti River, a clear lifeline for the animals living in the area.

Elephants are delighted by the prospect of a swim and a tussle with each other, and rush down to the water. Although they do show some initial surprise at seeing a research vehicle parked up by the water's edge.

Currently, we are at the end of the wet season, so all the zebra and wildebeest are in the salt pans which leaves the elephants to enjoy the new vegetation growth triggered by the rains. However, this time of year is also the period when human-wildlife conflict reaches very high levels, with elephants raiding crops and lions turning to livestock in the absence of game present on the plains.

The fence that is meant to separate the livestock and wildlife winds in and out of the river, which was dry from 1991 – 2009. With the Boteti flowing again, thirsty elephants break through the fence to get to the river, opening access routes for lions onto community land and for cattle into the park, where they can graze on abundant annual grasses.

I am very excited to be on board with EfA at the time when their focus is shifting to encompass research into the causes, consequences and solutions to human-wildlife conflict.

I am also enthusiastic about the education program, which targets children to change their attitudes towards wildlife. This will help to reduce future levels of human-wildlife conflict by teaching them how conservation can benefit them. I am very much looking forward to helping the charity to meet new challenges and continue with their vital research into elephant behaviour and ecology.



Wildlife Research Symposium by Dr Emily Bennitt



During the first week of February, the EfA team attended the Botswana Wildlife Research Symposium, held in Maun at the Wildlife Training Institute. Kate was the chair for the session on human-wildlife conflict, and carried out her role admirably. The symposium was an excellent opportunity to catch up with all the other researchers working in Botswana, and to meet some of the people that we had previously only communicated with via email.

One of the most important messages of the symposium was the need for researchers to spend more time thinking about the communities that are living alongside Botswana's wildlife. Researchers often get consumed by their passion for nature and ecosystems, sometimes forgetting the humans that are a huge part of that environment.

Another important point was the dramatic decline in herbivore species in northern Botswana. While there is a lot of media attention on rhino and elephant poaching, and deservedly so, bush-meat poaching is also having a huge impact on previously thriving herbivore populations, particularly in northern Botswana.

The third important topic was the hunting ban that has just been enacted in Botswana. This is intended to be an environmentally-conscious policy,

but the communities that were previously reliant on income from the trophy hunting industry are now left without any financial strategies. The concern is that these communities will cease to see the value in conserving their natural resources and may turn to poaching to meet their financial requirements.

Establishing artificial waterholes in some of the ex-hunting concessions may attract more wildlife, rendering them viable for photographic safaris, but we are as yet unsure of the effect on current migrations of large herbivores. The solution will not be straightforward, but the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, communities and researchers will all be working towards finding an acceptable compromise that enables us to preserve livelihoods and wildlife.



Ride for EfA in the MOMENTUM 94.7 Cycle Challenge



Join the *Ride for a Purpose* campaign and raise funds and awareness for *Elephants for Africa* in this year's Momentum 94.7km Cycle Challenge.

It takes place on **Sunday 16th November 2014** in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Currently in its 18th year, this iconic festival of cycling has established itself as one of the most celebrated sport events in the country, with over 30, 000 cyclists taking to the streets of Johannesburg last year.

Please register before the 25th September 2014.

- Get an *Elephants for Africa* pledge form and start signing up as many pledges as you can.
- Raise £150.00 or more, and you will receive a FREE cycling shirt to wear on the day. For an application form please email info@elephantsforafrica.org
- All pledge forms to be submitted to info@elephantsforafrica.org no later than 25th September.
- Register yourself on www.cyclechallenge.co.za and send us your registration number. If you wish to ride for your personal best time during the event and leave at your preferred seeding, then complete a pledge form and send it to us, notifying us that you wish to ride separately.
- Please tell us what shirt size you require.





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Special Thanks to:

- John and Martha Graham
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- Memphis Zoo
- Nicke Mecaskey Hetzel and Dick Hetzel
- Elephant Managers Association

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>

