

**Location:** Okavango Delta, Botswana  
**Level:** PhD  
**Status:** Complete  
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**Institution:** University of Bristol



### Background

Translocation is increasingly being used to deal with problem elephants, over-population and genetic bottlenecks. Captive-bred elephants, including orphaned and surplus individuals, can be released into the wild, but there are few data available on how these elephants integrate into resident populations.

### Methods and Results

Over a period of ten years we monitored the release of seven captive elephants (six males of various ages and one female) from a small captive herd. The three adolescent males integrated well into the complex fission-fusion society of wild bull elephants, despite having lived in captivity for eight years. The adult and juvenile males were more variable in the success of their integration, and the female did not join with a wild herd upon release. She has, however, borne three calves since her release and joined up with two females that were released from the captive herd after the end of this project.



One of the adolescent males was shot 7 years 10 months after release for damaging fences outside the protected area. Ten wild elephants were also shot in this incident, and it has been concluded that his death was not related to his years in captivity. The juvenile male was shot two years post release as a problem animal and we believe that he was released prematurely. One of the adult males was euthanized after getting into a fight with another male elephant and sustaining severe tusk wounds.

### Conclusions

Despite problems experienced by other releases of captive elephants, we have shown that captive-raised elephants can successfully integrate into a wild population, dependent on the release methods, the age and temperament of the elephant. Long-term studies are required to determine the longevity, breeding success, and eventual fate of captive-raised elephants after release.