

Memphis Zoo Visits the Makgadikgadi Pans

by Amanda Hadicke, Elephant Manager, Memphis Zoo

On February 18, 2013, I set out on an adventure that would ultimately change my life forever. After a 16-hour plane trip spanning the Atlantic Ocean, spending the night in the Johannesburg airport, having my flight delayed and re-routed, all the while carrying over 40 lbs. of cameras and equipment by hand, I finally landed in Maun, Botswana. My dream of someday seeing Africa had finally come true. I spent the next 10 days working with the research group Elephants for Africa (Efa) in the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park.

Elephants for Africa, which was founded by Dr. Kate Evans, is an elephant research group based in Botswana, Africa. Their research primarily focuses on the ecology of bull African elephants. They work to identify individual elephants and collect data on their behavior and social structures. They also collect fecal samples in order to carry out parasitology testing and DNA analysis. The Efa research team has recently relocated from the Okavango Delta to the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park. In addition to their already established research efforts, Efa is now assisting Botswana's Department of Wildlife in monitoring the elephants within the Makgadikgadi Pans.

Through the Memphis Zoo and the

Conservation Action Network, I was awarded a grant that enabled me to travel and work with the Efa research team in the field for a couple of weeks. It gave me the opportunity to observe wild elephant behavior and work side-by-side with the elephant researchers who are carrying out this very important work. It also purchased Efa five camera traps, and corresponding accessories, to assist them with their monitoring efforts of the elephants within the Makgadikgadi Pans.

While I was visiting, I also had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Obert Gwapela, who works for Botswana's Department of Wildlife and manages this national park. During our conversation, he inquired how much the camera traps cost. Kate told him, and he softly responded by saying that they were much more valuable than that. He felt the information that the cameras would be able to provide them would be invaluable. I was humbled to hear him speak. I was also astonished to find out that Mr. Gwapela graduated from the University of Tennessee at Martin. It just goes to show how small this world can be sometimes!

I have been volunteering and working with African elephants for the past 10 years, but until this trip I had never seen



an elephant in the wild. Every morning the Efa team set out on a trek to find elephants. Every day our mission was fulfilled. The Makgadikgadi Pans is home to a large number of bull elephants.

Every day we would see elephants basking in the shade of an acacia tree, enjoying a good mud wallow and savoring the water of the Boteti River. Lots of elephants would typically make their way down to the river in the late morning hours to swim and quench their thirst. We would routinely see large groupings of elephants as they would all gather down at the river. I will never forget watching a massive group of bull elephants swimming, playing and socializing at the river one day. It was truly an amazing sight to behold. All the old misconceptions of how male elephants lead more solitary lifestyles, as compared to the females, quickly left my mind. After seeing and experiencing all that I was fortunate enough to behold, I now see elephants, and the world, through new eyes.

I look forward to a long-lasting partnership between the Memphis Zoo and Elephants for Africa. I hope together we can help promote elephant conservation through research and education.

(top) Amanda Hadicke watching elephants on the Boteti River

(left) Bull elephants going for a swim



To find
out more

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about the research and
conservation efforts being
carried out by Dr. Evans

and her team,
please visit their
website at www.elephantsforafrica.org

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