

Elephants *for* Africa



Conservation through research and education

Elephant Tales Newsletter Issue 26



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Welcome to EfA - Jess Isden



Since our last newsletter in June, we have all been waiting anxiously to see whether the delta's flood waters would reach us. Following a very challenging wet season (with the rainfall less than half the average amount expected) we were relying even more than usual on the arrival of the flood.

During the rainy season, (normally November to April) the Okavango Delta receives water from the Angolan highlands, filling the only inland delta system in the world that doesn't flow out into the ocean. Slowly, these waters make their way south, eventually spilling into rivers that direct the water towards the salt pans, where they are rapidly absorbed.

Due to the time lag between the rains and the water meandering its way south, we expect our highest river levels in the midst of the dry season.

Following the poor rains, the Boteti river had been reduced to a series of small, murky pools of water. It was clear that the abundance of wildlife that relies on it, were struggling to find palatable water to drink. You can imagine our excitement then, when the flood arrived!

In late August, whilst out on a research drive, the call came through that the flood was slowly but steadily making its way down the riverbed.

The day's work was put on hold whilst the whole team congregated on the dry bed to witness the

amazing sight of fresh water creeping its way across the dry sand. As the water covered the dusty ground it fizzed and frothed, picking up and rolling dried elephant dung along with it.

As pools filled up, the water was hopping with fish and frogs that were being swept along with it, and occasionally flapping fish caught our eyes as they were pushed over shallow sandbanks.

Our research has continued throughout this dry period, and we look forward to examining our data to see what impact these dry and wet spells have on the elephant population and social structure.

Meanwhile, we were not the only ones to be excited about the return of the river. Khumaga's villagers also came out to witness the first waters arrive.

Many collected water from the front edge of the creeping flood to keep for good luck. Water is such an integral part of life in Botswana, (as reflected in the predominantly blue colour of the country's flag) and both the currency and the word for 'cheers' is Pula, which means 'rains'.

Keep up to date with how our next rainy season progresses, and how our research and community projects develop, by visiting our website or Facebook and Twitter pages. And let's keep our fingers crossed for a good rainy season this year!

Communities Learning to CoExist with Wildlife -Jess Isden



One of the greatest dangers to wildlife is the conflict that occurs when people and wild animals come into close proximity. Here, in the Boteti River region of central Botswana, wild elephants cause problems for the local subsistence farming community, because they trample fences to enter fields and eat crops.

Our Community Coexistence Project (CCP) is funded by the *GoodPlanet Foundation*; this three year project aims to find locally sustainable ways to reduce the crop-raiding issue.

Since June, the fields have been left fallow as the dry season took hold, and night-time temperatures plummeted to near zero. But despite not growing crops during this time, farmers are still busy tending their livestock, repairing field fences, gathering farming materials and removing weeds.

The last six months has also been a busy time for us. Last season we worked closely with ten farmers, to learn about their farming techniques and the challenges they face when it comes to elephants. As we prepare for the arrival of the next rainy season, we have extended our programme to include 25 farmers, and this year we invited them to apply to us for a place on the project.

For these 25, we will be regularly visiting their fields, assisting them with the correct and most effective use of mitigation materials (in particular the use of chilli pepper) and offering our advice on how they might keep their fields protected.

We will also be trialling several mitigation techniques that we think may help, including the use of solar beacons that randomly emit flashes of coloured light throughout the night.

Although our programme focuses on these 25 farmers, our education workshops remain open to everyone in the community. We have run three workshops during these months leading up to the rains, which have all been well attended.

They have learnt new techniques for burning chilli pepper in their fields, an effective way to deter elephants away. With their keen sense of smell, the undesirable yet harmless effects of chilli smoke cause even the biggest bull to alter his direction!

We are also facilitating useful discussions between community members, dispelling myths about wildlife behaviour (such as, elephants can use their trunks like a pole vault to get over my fence), sharing experiences of encounters and discussing how to remain safe. It is always heartening to hear a farmer say that they value the wildlife that lives alongside them, and recognise the benefits that wildlife tourism plays in their economy.

Following two seasons of low rainfall in Botswana, everyone here is keenly anticipating the start of the 2016-17 wet season. For both farmers and wildlife, we hope for a plentiful rainy season, and are looking forward to seeing our dry dusty environment transformed into mosaics of green and fertile fields.

The Boteti River Returns - Hayley Blackwell



When I first arrived here in May, the Boteti River had stopped flowing. The rains have been particularly poor over the past two years, and as such the Boteti had almost dried up completely. Large areas of the river bed had become dry and parched; every blade of grass grazed to the ground by large herbivores, turning the landscape dusty and barren.

It is not the first time that this has happened. In 1989 the Boteti started drying up and did not flow properly again for the next 20 years. With the return of the river in 2009, male elephants began re-colonizing the area; but this year, as the amount of water decreased so did the numbers of elephants that we were seeing. Some days we would drive for five hours and not see a single individual.

We waited and waited for the floodwaters, but there were rumours that we would not see them at all this year and we began to worry that we were at the start of another dry spell that could potentially last for many years. If this were the case, would the elephants leave the park for good? And what then for the future of our research?

Finally, at the beginning of August, the Boteti river returned. The whole team rushed to 'hippo pools' ahead of the oncoming water, and spent a wonderful afternoon following the river as it steadily made its way along the western edge of the national park. Everyone was in high spirits as we dipped our toes in to the cool, advancing water and watching as the landscape was transformed.

The return of the river has created a few logistical challenges; we can't drive out of the park into Khumaga village to carry out our educational work with the local community. The narrow, shallow stretch of water that we used to drive across is now too deep for the cars. However, at the beginning of this year EfA became the proud owners of a small boat, thanks to funds raised by Susan Lees and her art exhibition.

Unfortunately, as the river took less time than we were expecting to reach the park, the boat was still in a yard in Maun when the waters arrived! After a quick trip into town to collect it we were able to take to the water, and had to learn how to pole and motor our way across the river.

Over the next few weeks the Boteti continued to get wider and deeper. Thankfully the number of elephants has also increased, and it never fails to make me smile when we see them splashing and frolicking in the water. The river and the surrounding area have become much busier generally, as the summer temperatures soar above 40 degrees.

Each day large numbers of elephants, zebra, wildebeest, kudu and impala flock to the water. Green grass shoots have sprung up all along the edge of the river; the trees have begun to grow new, green leaves, and great swathes of aquatic plants have bloomed, adding colour to the landscape. The return of the river has brought life back to the Makgadikgadi once more.

Environmental Clubs Update - Jess Isden



Our successful partnership with the Environmental Club at Khumaga Primary School has been extended to also include the primary school in Phuduhudu village. Mogolokwane Primary School is at the heart of the small community, and it is nestled on the boundaries of the national parks. Despite being surrounded by wildlife, the villagers feel isolated from it, and are heavily restricted in the types of agricultural activity they can engage in.

So, we felt it was even more important that we engage with the community there. We know from our experiences at Khumaga primary school, that pupils go home with stories of what they have learned; and so providing the members of Environmental Club with education about wild animal ecology, behaviour and importance is likely to have a much wider impact than on just the children themselves.

The teacher in charge of the club is a passionate and charismatic lady called Mma Hitlang; she always greets us with huge smiles and joyous laughter. There is a noticeable contrast here compared to the pupils at Khumaga. In Khumaga, children regularly see tourists and unfamiliar people who come through on their way to the national park entrance gate. However, Phuduhudu rarely receives outside visitors, so the children's reaction to us is a mixture of shyness and giggling fascination.

Our programme of activities aims to encourage children to think like researchers; asking questions about their environment, learning techniques in problem-solving and evaluating their results. In anticipation of the coming rains, we have been spending time discussing what changes come about in their local environment with the arrival of water. During one class, we discussed the water cycle and went on to think about how they might be able to measure the amount of rainfall their school, homes and cattle posts receive. Using recycled plastic

bottles, the children made and decorated rain gauges, that can be put out near their homes. We made a chart in their books so that after each storm they can record how much rain was received. Later in the year we will follow this up by geographically plotting the rainfall in their village and looking to see what effects the rain has had on their environment and ecosystems.

The opportunities for environmental education and capacity building are almost endless. Both schools have welcomed our involvement with excitement and enthusiasm. We would like to deliver more events, workshops and activities to local communities, not just through the school but also through family events.

Many community members ask questions about basic animal ecology, and particularly about how they can keep themselves safe around species like lions and elephants, who frequently roam the community lands. In order to meet this demand, EfA hopes to soon recruit a dedicated Education Officer, and to deliver a series of 'Living With' workshops. If you would like to support our efforts, find out how to make a donation on our [page](#).



Independence Day Celebrations - Hayley Blackwell



This year Botswana has celebrated 50 years of independence. Formerly a protectorate of Great Britain, Botswana was granted its independence in 1966, and formed a democratic government to take the country forward. Celebrating its independence is an important event here. Masego and I were lucky to participate in the celebrations in Khumaga, the village which is near our research camp.

The celebrations in the village began on Monday 26th September with dance competitions, an athletics competition, followed by football, volleyball and netball competitions. A few weeks ago Masego and I joined one of the local netball teams and had been training hard for the Independence tournament.

Our first match was against a team made up of the teachers from Khumaga Primary school, government officials and staff who work at a local tourist lodge. Both teams fought hard, but when the final whistle blew, our team was in the lead 28-22. Second place – not too bad considering the last time I played netball was in my school PE lessons about 7 years ago!

The next day there were speeches about the history of Botswana and all its tribes, and lots of singing and dancing as members of each tribe performed traditional songs. In the afternoon we were served a meal of fermented sorghum porridge cooked in hard melon, with cooked sorghum grains and ground beef – foods often served at gatherings in Botswana.

Then it was time for the singing competition, as different choirs performed their interpretation of a set song in front of a panel of judges. Everyone was in high spirits, and even Mankind and the Kgosi couldn't resist dancing to the lively music!

Finally, it was the day we had all been waiting for: Independence Day! There was a sea of blue, black, and white; the colours of the Botswanan flag, and smiling faces as the entire village gathered together to celebrate this momentous occasion. As we arrived, President Khama's official speech was being read out by a representative.

But there was no time for us to relax, Masego and I had volunteered to be part of the catering committee, so soon we were hard at work preparing the food for the big feast that feeds the whole village. We peeled a mountain of butternut squashes, then crushing packets and packets of biscuits to make the base of the cheesecake dessert. I also had to go around collecting the huge bowls and buckets of jelly which had been distributed amongst the fridges of various people in the village.

Rice, beef, goat meat, chicken, crushed butternuts, chackalacka (spicy relish), coleslaw and soup were dished out to the masses, washed down with a cup of specially prepared ginger drink, and followed by our dessert. Everyone returned home tired but happy, with very full stomachs.

When I applied to become an elephant researcher in Botswana, I never in my wildest dreams expected it would involve cooking for an entire village. But everyone in Khumaga played a different role in the celebrations, and I think it is important that the EfA team support and integrate with our local community.

As an outsider, I feel so privileged that the people of Khumaga have accepted me and allowed me to participate in their celebrations of this historic event. I mostly enjoyed seeing so many smiling, friendly faces and people making me feel welcome. Here's to the next 50 years Botswana!

Life as a Research Assistant - Gape Radinaane



Scientific research has been my primary interest because of my curiosity to learn and know more, which I imagine is the same for many of those who find themselves in the field. However, with little experience in wildlife research, joining EfA has given me a greater insight and depth of knowledge. These experiences extend from the principles of scientific research, to survival skills in the bush, especially with the interaction of wild animals on daily basis.

Collecting data on elephants is no easy task; we can sometimes spend many hours driving around the national park and not be guaranteed any sightings! When you do sight an elephant, there is always a small element of uneasiness, because no matter how long you have been around these large creatures, you never know how they may react.

At the same time, excitement at being able to observe these animals is always there. Usually sightings are filled with discussion, especially when it comes to putting each individual into an age bracket. Ageing elephants from under 10 years to the grandfathers of more than 36 years old is something I have been patiently learning.

The river sessions give us another insight into elephant behaviour. Sitting at these spots, where bulls tend to congregate in large numbers, is not always exciting in itself; but the opportunity to quietly observe the wildlife coming to the river is overwhelmingly humbling. It gives us more understanding of the males' social interactions.

The Boteti River seems to be a socializing area for the male elephants. Here they not only drink but also share in a range of social behaviours such as greetings, sparring, rumbling and playing. These sessions have provided me with an unforgettable way to learn and understand the framework and principles of field research.

All that we do here would not be worth it if that knowledge was not given back to the local communities as a set of working solutions to their human-wildlife conflict problems. The Khumaga village particularly is at the edge of the park and thus a hotspot for human wildlife conflict. The education program with the local primary schools allows students to do hands on activities, and I have really enjoyed being able to lead some of these classes.

Living in the national park has given me an opportunity to appreciate nature; it's still mind-blowing to wake up in the middle of the night, to see a giraffe browsing peacefully by my tent, or to be woken by the roar of lions during the early hours of the morning.

Even those less enjoyable moments, such as digging the research car out of the deep sand during the soaring heat, adds to the daily experience of field research (but I'm thankful that those moments are not usually part of our everyday routine!). All these invaluable experiences would not have been possible without the highly committed EfA projects, and I am glad to be a part of this team.

Students fly the flag for EfA - Jess Isden



We welcome Masters and PhD students at our camp to assist us with furthering our knowledge of the elephants and community needs in the area. So it is always with pride and excitement when we hear that they have completed their studies.

Josephine successfully gains her PhD

It is with great pleasure that we share the news that Josephine Walker is now officially Dr Walker having successfully been awarded her PhD: *'Theory and practice of parasitic nematode management at the wildlife-livestock interface'* from the University of Bristol.

Well done Josephine and thanks for your wonderful contribution to *Elephants for Africa*. For a copy of her thesis please email info@elephantsforafrica.org to access her published papers, please click [here](#).



Amy has passed her Masters

Amy Chamberlain took on the challenge of a Masters degree and we are delighted to share the news that she has successfully been awarded her degree from the University of Bristol.

Her thesis: *'An Analysis of the Human Elephant Conflict Situation in the Boteti Area, Botswana: The Economic Cost of Elephant Crop Raiding'* is a great contribution to our ongoing Community Coexistence Project. To access her thesis, please click [here](#).



Fundraising News - Kate Evans



Memphis Zoo - Art for Elephants

It was another successful year at the *Art for Elephants* fundraiser hosted at Memphis Zoo. It was a wonderful turn out, for the talk, kids' activities and silent auction and it was a busy afternoon bringing awareness of *Elephants for Africa's* work to the heart of Tennessee.

This event would not be possible without the dedication of the elephant team at the zoo alongside the Research Centre staff. Special thanks go to the wonderful donations from artists from all over the world: Sophie Niemann, Di Venter, Britney Boswell, Joshua Strydom, Abbey Bratcher, Karen Pulfer Focht, Jeremy Black and Corrina Thurston. The amount topped last year's total with almost \$5700 being raised.

Recent Donations

Many thanks to the **Jacksonville Zoological Society** and **Utah's Hogle Zoo** for their generous donations to our work.

The **Milwaukee County Zoo's Elephant Appreciation day** was a lively event raising £1264.72 and educating the visitors about elephant conservation and the importance of this iconic species.



EfA Calendars for 2017



Elephants for Africa 2017 Calendars are now available to order.

Once again, Dr Jess Isden has taken up the challenge of using her wonderful photography to put together a beautiful wildlife calendar available to purchase in support of EfA.

This year the calendar also includes some images from one of our students, Connie Allen, who was with us this year for her Masters research and is upgrading to a PhD.

Each month features a beautiful image of the elephants we study and other animals we have the privilege of seeing during our work and travels.

Alongside each of the images is a little information about the photograph to give you some more insight into some of their behaviours and habits.

- All profits from the sale of this calendar go to *Elephants for Africa*, with a percentage going towards Connie's PhD work.
- Features stunning nature images as well as information about the photos.
- Printed on FSC certified paper.
- Total cost including p&p within the UK £11.50, £18 including p&p for the rest of the world.

To order, click here to visit our [website](#). Thank you for your continued support!

EfA Calendars available in the USA.

This year we have a new calendar for our supporters in the USA.

Long-time supporters, Harry Peachey and photographer Rick Preberg, have stepped up to our fundraising challenge and put together a stunning calendar of African elephant images, with all proceeds going to EfA.

Graphic design by Andrew Schall printing by Jim Cunningham of Printing Industries of Ohio.

- All profits from the sale of this calendar go to *Elephants for Africa*.
- Features stunning images of African elephants.
- Cost within the USA \$14.99 + \$4.99 shipping.

To order, please visit our [website](#).





How to Donate:

Should you wish to make a donation, you can do this online through BT's MyDonate page:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/elephantsforafrica>

Or you can pay directly to our bank account, please contact us for details.

We accept cheques made payable to:

Elephants for Africa
Dr Kate Evans
3 Priest Park View
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Our Facebook Page:

If you enjoy regular updates from the field, please like our page:

<https://www.facebook.com/elephantsforafrica>

Recycle Mobile Phones

If you have recently purchased a new phone or a PDA, remember to recycle your old ones by sending them to us at the above address.

Donation Wish List:

- £20 - A pair of children's binoculars
- £45 - Delivery of a class to Environmental Club
- £50 - Teacher visit to the National Park
- £100 - Take ten pupils in to the park for one day
- £200 - Delivery of a workshop to a community
- £250 - One month's fuel for research
- £400 - Equipment box for Environmental Club
- £800 - Monthly cost of hiring an education officer
- £2500 - Production of 'Living With' workshop video to donate to the communities

Special Thanks to:

- Amesbury School Trust Ltd
- Harry Peachy
- Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens
- John McClung
- Memphis Zoo
- Milwaukee County Zoo
- Tony Travis
- Utah's Hogle Zoo