

# Elephants *for* Africa

Conservation through research and education



Elephant Tales Newsletter

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# Welcome by Dr Kate Evans, Founder & Director



Photo by Scott Ramsey

A lot has happened since we sat down in the first week of March to discuss and decide on the news we wanted to share with you, our supporters around the world. The start of the year was a great success with EFA starting another partnership with a new school, a Living with Elephant event in one of our neighbouring communities and a new research project on the go. Unfortunately, things have taken an unforeseen turn and we find ourselves, as many of you do, in uncharted territory. We are taking the threat of the coronavirus very seriously, and our main concern is how we can best protect our staff and the communities we work with. Whilst we have to reconsider what and how we can best proceed with our outreach work, this is also a great opportunity to work on a number of small projects that we have planned for a while but never found the time to action, such as our educational YouTube videos. And of course, we will continue our elephant monitoring and research projects.

As it is the middle of the harvest season in Botswana it is vital that we continue to support the farmers at this time so they can secure as much of their crops as they can in these uncertain times. We are also utilising our village notice boards as means for the rural communities to get access to information about the coronavirus. We are also planning some activities we can post here for the children to keep them engaged whilst the schools are closed.

Sadly many of our local supporters have been hard hit with the closure of the borders which has effectively closed tourism in Botswana (if you have booked a safari please consider postponement rather than cancellation) and so are unable to continue their support of our work. We of course wish them well and hope that they and their staff will be able to pick things up once tourists are free and able to visit this beautiful country again.

Global Giving has offered a lifeline just as we need it as this week all eligible **donations up to \$50** per unique donor per organisation will be **matched at 50%** between 0900 Eastern Time on Monday, March 23, 2020, to 23:59 Eastern Time on Friday, March 27, 2020. So perhaps if you are confined to the indoors and would usually grab a coffee on the way to work you might consider donating the equivalent amount to our campaign [Bit.ly/EfA\\_Donate](https://bit.ly/EfA_Donate)

We understand that many of you are now working from home limiting your social contact, if you are looking for meaningful ways you can contribute to the outside world or need an activity to keep the children busy for an hour or so, please do consider becoming a citizen scientist and help us age estimate the male elephants we have captured on our camera traps. Simply sign up on SnapShotSafaris and start today [bit.ly/EfAcitizenscience](https://bit.ly/EfAcitizenscience)

# Expanding our Community Outreach Project to Motopi

by Dr Kristine Meise



Photo by Scott Ramsey

The 'Living with Elephants' workshops have been an integral part of our community coexistence project since the start of our programme in 2014. So far, we have focused on our three partnering communities which are directly adjacent to the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park and experience high levels of human-elephant conflict. However, the majority of national parks and wildlife reserves in Botswana are unfenced, meaning that animals can freely move between them, crossing through community land far away from park boundaries, thus competition for resources are not restricted to those communities on the borders of wildlife areas.

Motopi is a small community located about 10km from the north-western corner of the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park and, like other communities in Botswana, has seen a rapid increase in elephant numbers over the past 10 years, with elephants now posing a real threat to the security and sustainability of the livelihoods of many community members. However, due to its distance to the national park, Motopi is not considered prime wildlife-conflict area and few initiatives address the issue of human-wildlife conflict in this community.

With the help and funding from Travel for Impact, we were able to initiate a three day 'Living with Elephants' event in Motopi with the aim to facilitate coexistence between humans and elephants. We visited the local primary and junior secondary school, held a Kgotla (village) meeting and workshops at a local cattlepost, providing the participants with a detailed introduction in elephant ecology and behaviour, a discussion about the appropriate response upon encountering an elephant, and an overview over mitigation methods that can be used to deter crop-raiding elephants from a field.

The event has been a strong success with good feedback from the farmers, teachers and students alike. One farmer even approached us to ask whether it wouldn't be possible to hold similar workshops at the neighbouring community, as he believes that they would also greatly benefit from the information we provided. We sure hope to receive further funding to make this happen!

# Nxwee farmers come together to cluster farm

by Dr Kristine Meise



After a two year drought Botswana has finally experienced some much-needed rain and the landscape has transformed from dull brown to a lush green. The farmers in the Boteti region were eager to turn their misfortunes from last year around. Encouraged by the good rains in November and December last year, many farmers around the village of Khumaga have ploughed their fields in anticipation of a good harvest.

Knowing the risk of elephants destroying their crops, a group of farmers, from a cattle post called Nxwee, came together to not only prepare their fields, but also to install a fence around the outer boundary of their fields, which are lying directly next to each other, to protect their crops. The riverbed, where these farmers have their fields, is particularly productive, but due to a common border with the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park they are often the first to be raided by elephants and raids occur more frequently than in other locations. While chilli has been proven to be very effective in deterring elephants from fields, it needs to be used every night throughout the cropping season, making it a big commitment for the often older community members that are working in the fields. Seeing this group of farmers working together to ensure humans and elephants can co-exist in the region is incredible encouraging, both for our project, but also for the efforts of conserving the African savannah elephant in Botswana. Luckily, we were able to find very generous donors who provided funding to support the Nxwee farmers with the solar equipment they needed to electrify the fence. Thank you Melissa & Stuart Strahl and Jackie & Carl Johnson for your support!

News has spread fast about this cooperative initiative and the effectiveness of working together and creating 'cluster-farms', which are economically more viable to protect with electric fencing and have the added advantage of opening up space for elephants, by focusing farming efforts in more localised areas so that elephants and other wildlife have space to traverse community lands without coming into contact with humans. As this solution to coexist with wildlife becomes more and more popular, we are continuously looking for funding to support farmers, like the Nxwee farmers, who work not only to protect their crops, but also to contribute to the provision of corridors for the migrating elephants. If you would like to contribute to similar initiatives in the future, please don't hesitate to contact us.

# New School, New curriculum - by Walona Sehularo



The Environmental Club teacher at Motopi Junior Secondary School, Mr Andrew Pelaelo, has asked Elephants for Africa to come and assist with the weekly clubs he runs at the school. He initially contacted us in 2018, writing an email laying out his wish for us to partner with them, having heard about our work in local primary schools. Fast forward to 2020, and we are final now able to run monthly clubs at Motopi Junior Secondary School.

Of the 19 students that are in the club, nine are proud graduates of our Primary School Environmental Clubs in Khumaga, Phuduhudu or Moreomaoto. All the students are older than the students we have previously taught, we had to consider how to run the club, to expand the knowledge of these environmental stewards, both old and new.

The overall aim for the Motopi Junior Secondary School is to give the students the tools that allow them to later find work in the broader conservation sector. While this of course will include science based research aspects, we will also cover other subjects, for example how to design a campaign and successfully use arts and crafts to effectively communicate environmental issues. We are planning to run a three-year program. The first year we will walk the students through the process of conducting a scientific project. The second year we will focus on outreach and how to take the scientific evidence obtained through research to the communities and educate them about a specific topic. Our first three lessons were a great success, teaching the students about conservation science and how to develop their own research questions and we are looking forward to have the students start their own research projects in the near future.

As only a small percentage of the 360 students of the Motopi Junior Secondary School is able to participate in the club, we aim to also bring a career fair to the school that will expose all students, not only the ones in our club, to the different career paths open to someone who would like to be involved in conservation. Junior Secondary Schools are the place where students need to decide on their next steps for life, and we wish to show them various pathways available to them should they be fortunate to pass and move on in their schooling, but also when they fail and have to find alternative solutions. Conservation has many different jobs that can accommodate all of their different talents, not just the brightest scientific minds.

# Elephant movement across community land by Dr Kristine Meise



*Photo: Research Assistant Thatayaone Motsentwa enjoying fly camping during the boundary survey*

Our new research project aims to increase our understanding of how and why elephants are utilising community land in the Boteti region. While elephants in other regions pass through community lands to gain access to valuable resources such as water, there is no obvious reason for the elephant population in the Makgadikgadi Pans to move into community land. Some people therefore believe that the elephant bulls leave the National Park to specifically target farmers' fields. However, it is equally likely that they opportunistically raid fields along so called 'elephant highways', historical travel routes that often exist for years or decades and are used by most elephant in the region.

In February, we conducted a boundary survey along the northern, southern and western boundary of the national park to map all entry and exit points of elephants across the border. Along the western boundary, a human-elephant conflict hotspot, we identified more than 100 transgression points, of elephants moving from the park into the river bed. Interestingly, most elephants seem to return to the park after they have utilised the river and only a small proportion of the population cross the riverbed and move into the communities where the conflict occurs.

With our current spoor tracking project we now hope to gain a better understanding of when and where these elephants cross into the community land and how their movements link to crop raiding behaviour. These data will allow us to create a predictive model that will help the communities understand what affects the likelihood of a raid and to identify areas that are most suitable for farming to limit elephant raids.

## How to Donate:

Should you wish to make a donation, you can do this online through Virgin's MoneyGiving page <http://bit.ly/EfADonate> or our Global Giving fundraiser [Bit.ly/EfA\\_Donate](http://Bit.ly/EfA_Donate)

You can also pay directly to our bank account, please contact us for details.

## Additional support:

If you live in the UK and shop online you can generate a donation for Elephants for Africa by signing up with <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/> and a percentage of the sales are donated to Elephants for Africa.

## Donation Wish List:

- £35 A months phone time for our field team
- £55 A day's food & board for our field team
- £100 Locally made housing for 2 camera traps
- £240 New tyre for our research vehicle
- £420 Solar-powered fridge for food (unfortunately ours has broken)

**Stay safe with best wishes from  
the Elephants for Africa team**

