

ELEPHANTS

There are two species of elephant: the African elephant and the Asian elephant. In this fact sheet we will be focussing on the African species.

LATIN NAME: *Loxodonta africana*

SUBSPECIES:

- Savanna elephant
- Forest elephant

POPULATION: approximately 450,000.

WHERE TO FIND THEM:

Sub-Saharan Africa:

- Forest elephants live mainly in western and central African countries in the African rainforest.
- Savanna elephants live in eastern and southern African countries.

HABITATS:

They can be found in a variety of different habitats, most are found on the savanna grasslands, but they can be found in forests, wetlands, and some survive in the desert.

IUCN STATUS: Vulnerable

*The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

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EXTINCT	EXTINCT IN THE WILD	CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	ENDANGERED	VULNERABLE	NEAR THREATENED	LEAST CONCERNED

LIFESPAN: Up to 70 years in the wild.

SIZE: Weight: 1,800-3,600kg (male elephants are larger than the females).

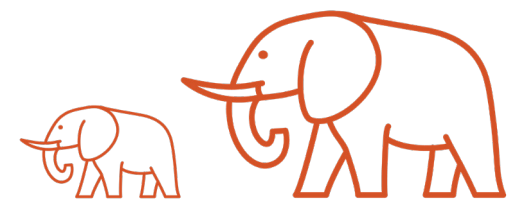
Height: (from ground to shoulder): 2-3.5m

DIET: Elephants are herbivores, they will eat almost any vegetation including fruit, roots, bark, leaves and grass.

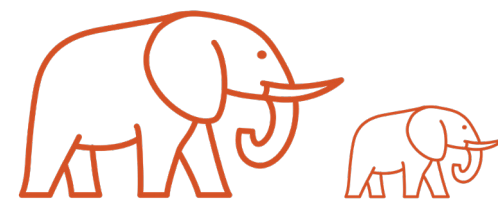
PREDATORS: The African elephant has no natural predators; however, lions may occasionally kill young or sick elephants who have strayed away from the herd.

Elephants are the second most intelligent land mammal on the planet.





ELEPHANTS



COMMUNICATION:



FOR YOUNG READERS:

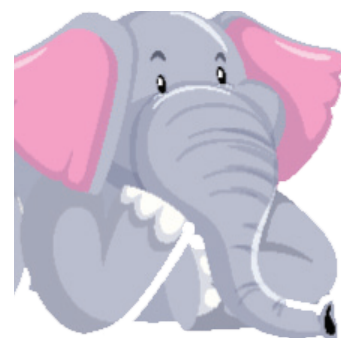
Elephants can't talk to each other in the same way that people can, instead they use a noise that we can't hear called infrasound, and they can rumble and trumpet. They also use their trunks to communicate with one another by touch.

Infrasound: elephants communicate with each other in different ways, some that we can hear, for example rumbling and trumpeting, but they can also communicate using infrasonic sound, which humans ears can't hear. Infrasound can travel up to 5km.

Trunks: they will also communicate and bond by touching each other with their trunks.

Chemical signals: they can communicate whether they are ready to mate through chemical signals in their urine, female elephants may also walk differently.

BEHAVIOUR:



FOR YOUNG READERS: A group of elephants is called a herd, a herd is made up of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties and their calves. The leader of the herd is the oldest elephant, she teaches the younger elephants where to find the best food, where the waterholes are and where to travel to find these things in the dry season.

To protect their skin from sunburn and insect bites elephants wallow in muddy pools so that the mud will stick to their skin and protect them, they will throw dust over their bodies using their trunks.

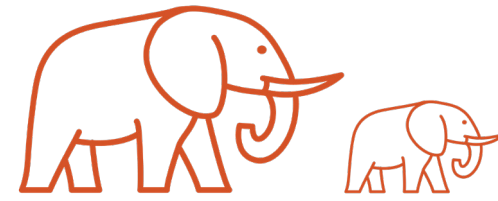
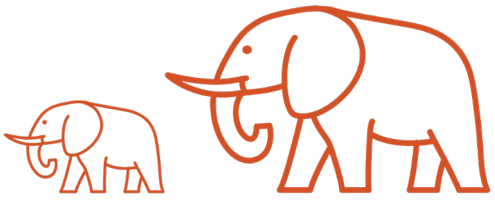
Elephants only sleep for a few hours a day.

Herds: a group of elephants is called a herd; they are made up of related adult female elephants and their calves and they will stay together for life. The leader of the herd is called the *matriarch*,* she is the oldest and most experienced elephant. The matriarch passes knowledge to the younger members of the herd about important things like, feeding grounds, migration routes and resource (water and food) availability during the different seasons. Elephants are not *territorial*,* and herds will join together with other family groups when there is enough food and water, sometimes as many as 1,000 elephants may gather together.

Food and Water: an adult male African elephant needs around 150kg of food a day and will need to drink the equivalent of two bathtubs full of water (200 litres) a day to survive.



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BEHAVIOUR:

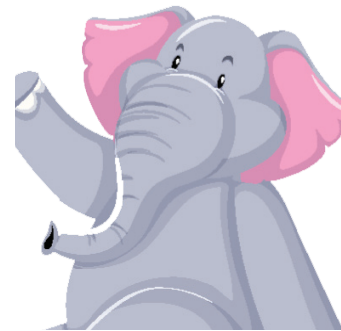
Sleep: because they must eat and drink so much, elephants only sleep for a few hours a day, the rest of the time they are either eating, or on the move looking for food. They sleep either standing up or lying on their side.

Migration: African elephants migrate to find food and water at the beginning of the dry season when it becomes harder to find. They usually follow the same migration routes every year. Once the rainy season arrives, they migrate back to greener pastures again.

Grieving: elephants are known to show a behaviour that looks like grief or mourning when one of them dies. They may pause over the body of an elephant and sometimes cover them with vegetation. They may stand over them silently and sometimes carry their bones or tusks with them when they move away. They also may repeatedly visit the body.

Wallowing: to protect their skin elephants will wallow in muddy pools, the mud sticks to their skin and helps to prevent sunburn and insect bites. They will also throw dust over their bodies using their trunks.

LIFECYCLE:



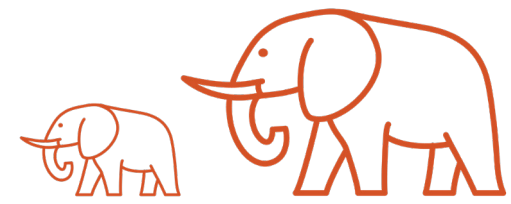
FOR YOUNG READERS: A baby elephant is called a calf. When an elephant calf is born it already weighs as much as an adult human and it is able to walk within just a few hours of being born.

Pregnancy: elephants are pregnant for almost two years (between 20-22 months) and when a baby elephant is born it is already as heavy as an adult human. It's important that when baby elephants are born they are able to keep up with the rest of the herd, most of them are on their feet and walking within a couple of hours. Usually elephants only have one calf, twins are very rare. They suckle milk from their mothers for the first six months. Did you know, there is approximately 100 times as much protein in elephant milk as there is in cow's milk?

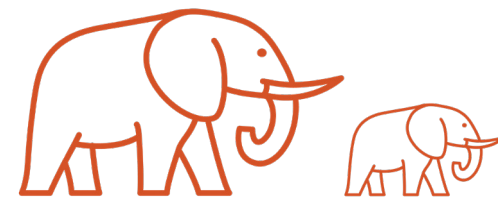
Herd: the herd will move more slowly once the calf has been born, so that it can keep up, they all help to take care of the young elephant.

Growing up: male (boy) elephant calves will leave the herd when they are between 12-14 years old, they will then either stay alone or join a few other male elephants in a small group. Female elephant calves stay within the herd.

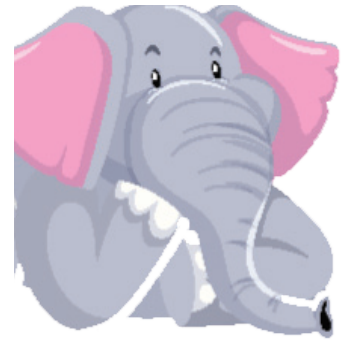




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ADAPTATIONS:



FOR YOUNG READERS:

Ears: elephant ears are large to help them to stay cool. They can also stick them out to make themselves look bigger if they are feeling scared.

Trunk: elephant trunks are useful. They can use their trunks like a straw to suck water up and then squirt it into their mouths to drink, to pick grass from the ground or to reach fruit and leaves higher up in the trees. They have a brilliant sense of smell and can lift their trunks high into the air to sniff for danger, food or water. They also use their trunks as a trumpet to communicate with other elephants, or they can use them to comfort another elephant - a bit like a human might give a hug. Elephants are really good swimmers and they use their trunks like a snorkel to breathe through while they swim. Baby elephants suck their trunks a bit like baby humans suck their thumbs.

Tusks: two of the elephant's teeth are known as tusks, they extend out their heads and grow throughout their lives, they use them to strip the bark off trees to eat, to defend themselves or to dig for water.

Skin: elephants have wrinkly skin which helps them to stay cool.

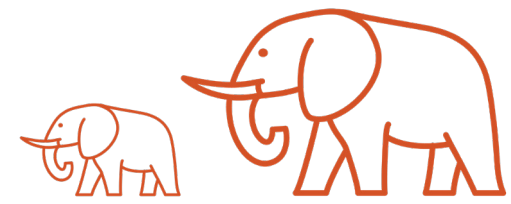
Size: elephants have very few natural predators as their large size makes them difficult to attack. Living in groups also provides protection as they can all look out for one another, there is strength in numbers.

Hair: Elephants have stiff, sparse hairs, which help them to stay cool by radiating heat away from their bodies

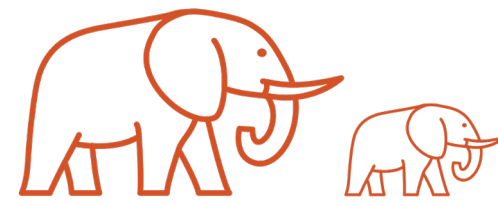
EARS:

Heat loss: large ears help elephants to lose heat by pumping the hot blood from their bodies into their ears, the blood vessels in their ears are close to the air and the blood cools quickly before being pumped back to the body. Flapping their ears creates a breeze, keeping their bodies cool.

Scaring predators: if an elephant is feeling threatened, they will stick out their ears to make themselves look even bigger, to frighten off predators or even a rival male elephant.



ELEPHANTS



ADAPTATIONS:

TRUNK:

Muscles: An elephant's trunk contain 40,000 muscles (a human has around 600 in their whole body) and can be strong enough to push over a tree and gentle enough to pick up a small piece of fruit without damaging it.

Breathing: an elephant's trunk has nostrils at the end of it which they use for breathing.

Drinking: due to their height, elephants' mouths are high above the water. When they want to drink, rather than bending down to get their mouths to the water, they can use their trunks like a straw, (they can hold over 2 litres of water in their trunk). They suck the water part way up their trunk and then squirt it into their mouths. They can also squirt it over their backs to help them to keep cool.

Trumpets: elephants can make a loud trumpeting noise with their trunks which they can use as a warning and to communicate with other elephants.

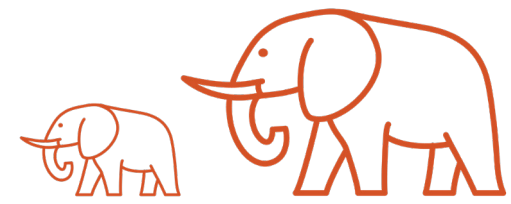
Snorkels: elephants are very good swimmers, they raise their trunks above the water to breathe, a bit like a snorkel, whilst they swim along with their mouths under the water.

Smelling: elephants have an incredible sense of smell - it is twice as good as a dog's; it can help them to find water up to 19km away and they can even tell the difference between quantities of food through smell alone.

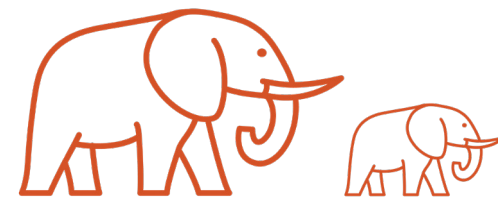
Reaching: elephants can stretch their trunks high up to reach leaves on trees that most other animals wouldn't be able to reach. Some elephants have learned to also stand on their back legs whilst they do this, enabling them to reach even higher!

Projections: African elephants have two finger-like projections at the ends of their trunks - they can use these to pick grass, leaves and fruit (Asian elephants have one projection).

Comforting: just like we might give our relatives a hug, elephants are very intelligent animals who grieve for one another and care for each other, they use their trunks to comfort one another. Elephant calves will suck their trunks just like human babies suck their thumbs!



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ADAPTATIONS:

TEETH: elephants have six sets of teeth in their lifetime, (humans have two sets). They need so many because they are constantly chewing vegetation which wears their teeth down. Their skull is enormous to be able to cope with all the munching that they do!

TUSKS: elephants have tusks, these are two teeth which continue to grow throughout their lives. Tusks are very useful to an elephant as they use them to dig for water, to defend themselves and their young and to strip the bark from trees which they find delicious! Male elephants also use them to compete with each other for mates.

FEET: elephants' feet are very large and are roughly circular. Having large round feet helps to spread their weight as they walk and prevents them from sinking into the ground. They can also use the soles of their feet to detect vibrations travelling through the ground, which is helpful for sensing danger and listening for other elephants.

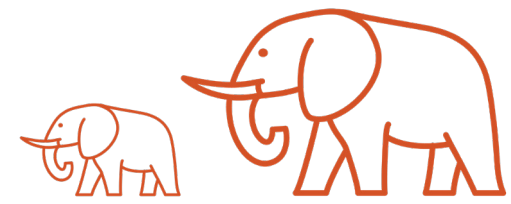
BONES: their leg bones have no cavity for marrow, instead they are solid bone which makes them perfect for bearing the elephant's weight.

SKIN: elephant skin is wrinkled; this helps them to stay cool by increasing the amount of skin that is in contact with the air. The blood which is close to the skin gets more of a chance to cool down before going back into the body again. The wrinkles also help to trap water and moisture, meaning they take longer to dry, keeping elephants cooler for longer after they have bathed.

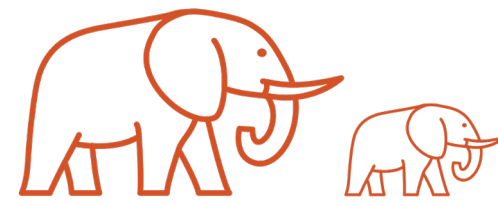
EYELASHES: long eyelashes help to keep dirt and sand from blowing into their eyes. Elephants also have a third eyelid which also helps to protect their eyes.

You can tell
African and Asian
elephants apart
by the ears.
African elephants
have bigger ears
that resemble the
shape of Africa.

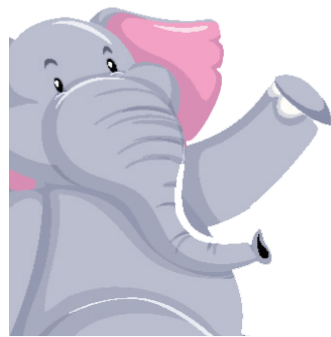




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WHY ELEPHANTS ARE IMPORTANT:



FOR YOUNG READERS: Elephants eat a lot of plants and seeds, when they go to the toilet the seeds come out in their poo and they start to grow. Think of elephants as the tree planters of the African savanna. In dry weather elephants use their tusks to dig up water from the ground, other animals can use this water when the elephant has finished drinking.

By eating lots of plants elephants help to make sure that trees don't take over and turn the grasslands into forests. Insects, like dung beetles, use elephant poo as food and to lay their eggs in.

Keystone species: elephants are a keystone species, this means that they have a huge impact on the places where they live, shaping the ecosystem* and making changes, which are vital to other species that live there. They are also known as an 'umbrella species' because they use such large areas, so by protecting elephants and their vast habitats many other species of animals and plants are also protected.

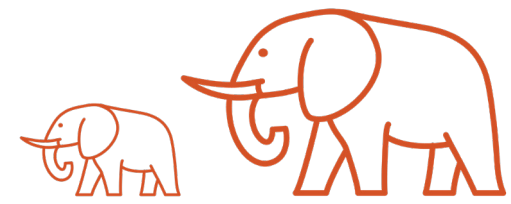
Seed dispersers: elephants act as seed dispersers, spreading the seeds they eat over vast distances. The seeds come out in the elephants' poo often a long way from the place where they ate the plant, enabling the plants to grow in new areas.

Dung: elephants produce an awful lot of poo (around a ton a week) as they are always eating, their poo provides food for lots of insects and also fertilises the soil, returning nutrients to it for plants to use.

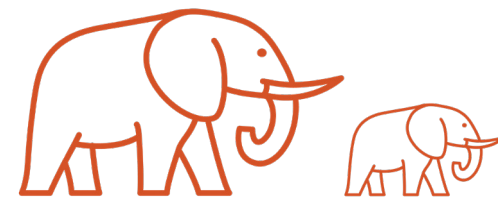
Healthy savanna: elephants eat a lot of vegetation, keeping the savanna clear from trees and shrubs - this is very important for grazing animals who need grassland to survive. Cheetahs also need open plains in order to hunt.

Water for other species: in the dry season when water is in short supply elephants use their tusks to dig water up from the ground. After they have finished drinking they leave behind mini waterholes which other animals can then use.

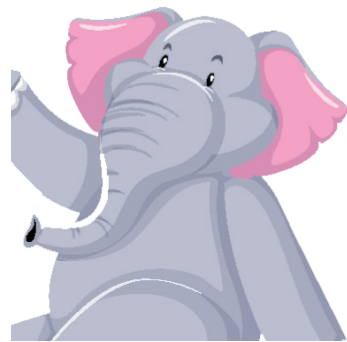
Making space: when elephants walk through the scrub and bushes in forests and the savanna, they make spaces in the vegetation, these holes open up the area for other animals to use, and allow in light for other species of plants to grow - this encourages biodiversity.*



ELEPHANTS



WHY DO ELEPHANTS NEED OUR HELP?



FOR YOUNG READERS: Elephant tusks are worth a lot of money and some people kill elephants to get their tusks so that they can sell it to make money.

There is less space for elephants to live as people are taking up lots of space.

In the 1930's there were approximately three million elephants, in 1979 (that's just over 40 years ago) there were around 1.3 million elephants. Today there are only around 450,000 elephants remaining. An elephant is killed by humans approximately every 20 minutes, that's around 30,000 a year, this is faster than elephants are being born.

Poaching: One of the main reasons that people want elephant tusks, known as ivory, is because they are worth a lot of money, they can be easily carved into ornaments and jewellery which are given as gifts. Despite a ban on the ivory trade in many countries, there is still high demand for ivory. Poachers kill elephants to get their tusks.

Habitat loss: humans are now living in and using large parts of the elephant's habitat and migration routes are being blocked by towns, farms and roads, this means that they have less space to find food and water and are more likely to come into contact with poachers. It also means that elephants are sometimes culled (killed) as their habitats are too small to cope with their numbers.

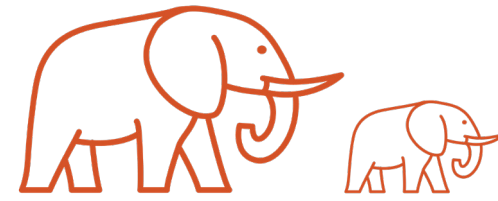
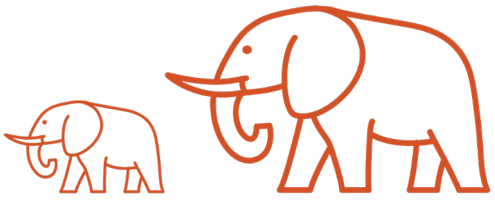
Human conflict: because elephants have lost much of their habitat, they are now having to share it with humans, this means that sometimes they pass through villages and farms. Because of their size they can cause damage to buildings and may destroy crops by eating them or walking on them, elephants are sometimes shot because of this.

Hunting: in some places hunting elephants for sport is still legal.

Climate change: temperatures and weather patterns across the world are changing. With rising temperatures and decreasing rainfall in some of the areas where elephants live, they are more at risk from drought. If they cannot find enough to eat or drink, elephants won't survive.



ELEPHANTS



HOW DOES DSWF HELP?

DSWF helps programmes across Africa and Asia protecting elephants from poachers and villagers whose crops have been raided by elephants. Our team is also fighting for a permanent ban on ivory. One of DSWF's most important projects is to rescue and rehabilitate baby orphan elephants who have lost their mothers, so they can get a second chance in the wild.

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

ADOPT - by adopting an elephant you will directly fund DSWF's ground-based work protecting elephants in the wild.

USE YOUR VOICE - to let others know about the problems elephants are facing and how you can help protect them.

BE MORE GREEN - there are lots of things that we can all do to help the planet and it's incredible wildlife, [click this link](#) to find out what you can do!

*GLOSSARY:

- *Adaptations*: a change which occurs over time which makes an organism better suited to its environment.
- *Baobab tree*: is one of the biggest trees in Africa, sometimes called the 'tree of life'.
- *Biodiversity*: the number of different species of plant and animal.
- *Ecosystem*: living things interacting with one another and their environment.
- *Matriarch*: a female leader.
- *Territorial*: an area occupied and then defended by an animal or group of animals.

World
Elephant Day
is celebrated
annually on 12
August.

