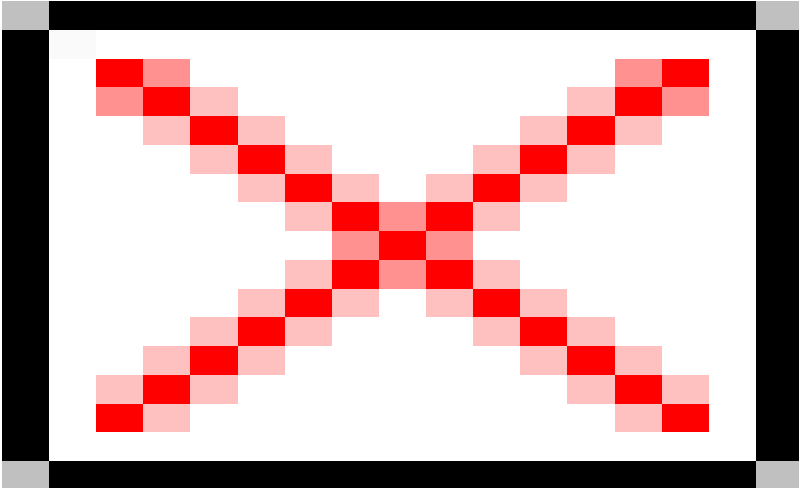




Elephant (African)



African Elephant:

Loxodonta africana

Distribution:

Africa south of the Sahara. They are divided into two sub-species - the savannah/bush and forest elephants.

Habitat:

Savanna grassland, forest.

Size:

It is the largest land mammal.

Male - height 3.3m at shoulder weight up to 6000kg, (same as 10 small cars!)

Female - weight up to 4000kg. They can grow up to 4 m tall - the height of a double decker bus!

Gestation:

22 months giving birth every 2 - 4 years. The babies can stand up within half an hour of being born.

Life-span:

60 years - more than 80 years in captivity.

Speed:

The fastest elephants can charge at speeds of up to 40km/hr. (25 mph).

Behaviour

Who has the biggest ears - the Asian or African elephant? Find out more about their cousins, the [Asian Elephant](#)

Their trunk is actually an extension of their upper lip and nose breathing through two nostrils at the end of it. It contains 40/100,000 muscles and no bones and they can use it to such delicacy to be able to pick a blade of grass. With it they can suck up 3 gallons of water in one go and spray it over themselves to keep cool.

They are herbivores eating fruits, grasses, bark and roots. They need to eat 136 kg a day.

Their large thin ears, shaped a little like the continent of Africa, act as large radiators allow excess heat to escape.

African elephants move around in herds of females or 'cows' with their calves. Adult male 'bulls' only join them during the mating season. They continue to grow throughout their lives which means that the biggest elephant in a herd is usually the oldest. Their tusks are really extended teeth which also continue to grow. During their lives they may have 6 sets of teeth but by the time they are 40 - 60 they don't grow any new ones and so it is no

It is uncommon for them to starve to death. Indeed an 'elephant graveyard' could be such a place where elephants go to look for softer vegetation to eat. They use their tusks for a number of purposes such as digging up tree roots and stripping bark off trees to eat and digging holes to reach underground water sources.

Importance

African elephants are very important to the eco-system in which they live. In fact the role they play is so important that they are known as a 'keystone' species on which numerous other species rely. Some plants need to be digested by an elephant before the seeds will germinate, including up to a third of tree species in their habitat.

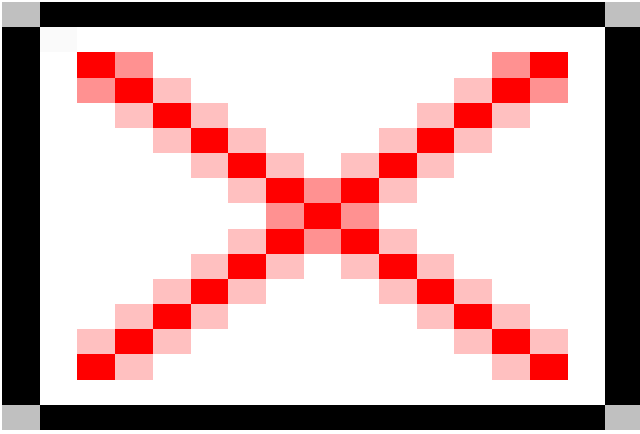
Their large size and taste for roots leads to pathways through forests being cleared. This allows sunlight into an otherwise dense and dark forest giving the opportunity for a wider variety of flora to grow which in turn encourages a wider variety of fauna. These pathways act as natural firebreaks. Some of the ancient ones are so well established that they have been turned into roads!

Elephants and Humans

Unlike their cousins the Asian elephant, African elephants aren't easily domesticated. There are between 470,000- 690,000 African elephants which is down from 1.3 million in the 1970s, mainly due to poaching for ivory during the 1980s.

In 1989 there was an international ban on ivory although it is still sold illegally to markets in Africa and Asia. Although the overall number of elephants in Africa has declined, certain populations are doing so well that they have had to be culled in order to maintain the habitat where they live. and due to human settlements and crops restricting the areas within which they can move. This can bring them into conflict with humans, especially if they trample on their crops. The Massai people, however, live in harmony with them since their staple food is cows which they keep out in the open.

Buzz off!



In parts of Africa elephants and people have not been getting on. The elephants trample and eat farmers' food and people kill and hunt elephants to keep them away from their land, but for many farms there is now a solution - bees.

How can one of the largest land mammals on earth be afraid of tiny bees? Well, have you ever been stung by a wasp or a bee? It hurts! And elephants, who are famous for their good memory, never forget. This discovery came after researchers in Africa noticed that elephants did not feed from trees that had bee hives in them. Armed with this new knowledge a British biologist named Lucy King carried out tests to understand and document the elephants behaviour and reactions to the buzzing bees.

'Once stung, twice shy' is true for elephants too as they avoid bees, beehives and behave very well around them in order not to stir them up. A solution to keep elephants away from farms became clear - the researchers attached beehives to fences that were usually bulldozed to the floor by hungry elephants. Now, when elephants disturb the fence and try to push their way through they stir up hoards of angry bees and scarpers quickly!

During a test this technique reduced the number elephant break-ins by a whopping 93% leaving both farmers and the elephants happier. In the past, elephants and people have been fighting for space, with both struggling to find or grow food. Farms are spreading and the elephants' habitat is getting smaller. Some african elephant species are endangered as the illegal trade in ivory (elephant tusks) and poaching continues, but this solution to the problem of sharing land will hopefully help improve elephant populations and get their relationships with humans buzzing.

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