ELEPHANTS

FACTS

- Elephants are the world's largest land animals and one of our most iconic species.
- In Africa, the elephant population has declined from 5-10 million in 1930 to around 500,000 today. Over 20,000 elephants are poached every year. Equally troubling, Asian elephants have seen their numbers decline from 200.000 to roughly 40,000 over the course of the last century.97 Only 2500 Sumatran elephants are left on earth. This map shows the distribution of African elephants, while this map pinpoints the locations of Asian elephants.



- Why do people say that elephants never forget? Elephant brains weigh almost 5 kilograms, the largest of any land animal, which gives them extraordinary memory storage and recall.
- Elephants are one of the few animals on earth that can recognize themselves in a mirror—which means that they have a sense of self, distinct from others!
- Elephants have saved humans from drowning!
- Elephants are capable of complex thoughts and deep feelings, including love, anger, and sadness.98 For instance, when two elephants are reunited, it is a highly emotional occasion. The greeting ceremony begins with exuberance and drama, concluding with expressions of what humans would describe as utter joy.99
- Elephants' sight is relatively poor, so they rely on smell and sound to guide their decisions, which explains their long and sensitive trunks.



WHY THEY MATTER

Economic Contribution: From books to films to poetry, elephants have inspired all of us for centuries. In very practical terms, elephants are "tourism magnets," attracting funding that helps protect wilderness areas. Each African elephant generates at least \$1.5 million annually100 in eco-tourism for the local economy—critically needed resources for African communities. By one estimate, elephant poaching reduces African tourism by \$25 million a year.¹⁰¹

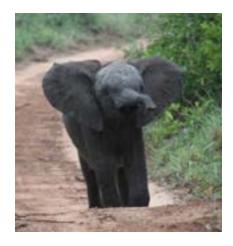
Role in the Ecosystem: Elephants are a keystone species, playing an important role in maintaining the biodiversity of the ecosystems in which they live. They flatten dense grasslands, creating habitat for smaller species. African elephants also dig water holes, which are used by other species. Elephants travel long distances in search for food, dispersing seeds contained in their waste along



the way, helping to generate new green growth.¹⁰² In some areas, species of plants and trees rely entirely upon elephants for seed dispersal for their survival.

THREATS

Poaching: The most severe threat facing African elephants is poaching and the now illegal global ivory trade. More than 100 elephants are killed every day for their tusks. In recent years, poaching of elephants has increased exponentially, even in the face of global outrage and treaties, leading to dramatic reductions in this already vulnerable species.¹⁰³ Asian elephants are being targeted by poachers for their skin which is used for commercial and medicinal purposes.¹⁰⁴



Habitat Loss: Habitat loss fuels a vicious cycle in the elephant ecosystem. Rising and expanding human populations reduce the habitat available to elephants, putting them in closer proximity to humans, leading to more elephant killings.¹⁰⁵

Climate Change: Elephants are already feeling the impacts of global warming. Droughts lead to food shortages and reduced habitat. Droughts also disrupt the mating season, which leads to fewer offspring.¹⁰⁶

HOW TO HELP

Join the Movement to Stop the Ivory Trade: Illegal or legally sourced, the ivory trade is decimating our remaining elephants. China, once the world's largest importer of ivory, and long considered the country most responsible for the decimation of elephants, recently joined the United States, declaring a near total ban on ivory sales. Nonetheless illegal trade continues throughout the world. Many countries ban trade altogether but some, such as Great Britain, allow trade in antique or "certified" ivory, but those limitations are often ignored.

Speak Up Against Trophy Hunting. The National Rifle Association and the Safari Club, both big-game trophy hunting groups, successfully petitioned the Trump Administration to reverse the Obama-era rules that banned imports of elephant tusks and other animal parts. Although our courts stepped in, Trump's officials are still "studying the issue." Let's keep the pressure on. Write to Donald Trump and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and tell them to keep the ban! And tell the National Rifle Association and the Safari Club to back off.

Protest Elephant Exhibitions: Elephants are used for a variety of human entertainment – from the circus to elephant-back rides – which contributes to their endangerment. It is important to speak out against these cruel practices.¹⁰⁷

Practice Sustainable Tourism: Only travel with companies that are certified as sustainable. If you are fortunate enough to see an animal in the wild, make sure that your interaction is respectful.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ARTICLES/BLOGS/READINGS

Basic Facts About Elephants - Defenders of Wildlife

https://defenders.org/elephant/basic-facts

This article gives basic background information about elephants including their diet, range, population size, and behavior among other info.

End Illegal Wildlife Trade - Defenders of Wildlife

https://defenders.org/end-illegal-wildlife-trade

This article gives a brief description of the issues with the illegal wildlife trade and ways to combat it.

Who Will Save the Elephants? Inside the race to make sure that the planet's largest land mammal doesn't just disappear - Vogue

https://www.vogue.com/projects/13544708/save-the-elephants-elephant-crisis-fund/

This is an article on elephant trophy hunting and conservation efforts.

Human - Elephant Conflict - World Wildlife Federation

http://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/endangered_species/elephants/human_elephant_conflict.cfm

This article highlights the issues elephants face as their habitat continues to shrink as well as showing the consequences of people living in the same area as elephants.

VIDEOS

Elephants 101 - National Geographic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aw6GkiCvcWs

This video presents an overview of both Asian and African elephants - their habitat, way of life, and, unfortunately, their most pressing threats to their survival.

TED-Ed: Why Elephants Never Forget - Alex Gendler

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISXNqsOoURg

It's a common saying that elephants never forget. But the more we learn about elephants, the more it appears that their impressive memory is only one aspect of an incredible intelligence that makes them some of the most social, creative, and benevolent creatures on Earth.

STORYTELLING

Elephant: King Of The Kalahari - National Geographic

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL_S4UjgdJ4

Botswana is home to more African elephants than anywhere else in the world. Every year, thousands of elephants trek over 7,000 miles in search of food and life-giving water. The desert is a hostile place, especially as the dry season takes hold, so the elephants must use their strength and wit to survive.



OTHERS WORKING ON THIS

Save the Elephants

https://www.savetheelephants.org/

Save the Elephants is an organization that both monitors the location of elephant species for conservationists and researchers as well as works with wildlife agencies to protect elephants from poaching.

Elephant Aid International

https://elephantaidinternational.org/

Elephant Aid International works to promote greater educational awareness of elephants and provides hands-on assistance to local caretakers of both wild and captive elephants.

International Elephant Foundation

https://elephantconservation.org/

The International Elephant Foundation strives to create a sustainable future for elephants by supporting elephant conservation, education, research, and management programs worldwide.

REPORTS

Status of African elephant populations and levels of illegal killing and the illegal trade in ivory - IUCN

https://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/african_elephant_summit_background_document_2013_en.pdf

The results of this report show that levels of poaching and the illegal ivory trade started to increase again in the mid-2000s, following an easing in the 1990s, the rate of increase jumping dramatically from 2009. The overall trend appears to be leveling off in 2012 compared to 2011, but still at an unsustainably high level.

Elephants are the latest conflict resource - United Nations

https://www.traffic.org/site/assets/files/4180/elephants in the dust.pdf

The African elephant, the largest remaining land mammal on the planet, is facing the greatest crisis in decades. Reports of mass elephant killings in the media vividly illustrate the situation across many African elephant ranges. This Rapid Response Assessment provides an overview of the current state of the African elephant alongside recommendations for action to ensure its protection.

