

A voice for

ELEPHANTS



This pic:
A bull elephant
dusted with red soil
in Kenya's Tsavo
National Park

IN THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES OF FEATURES ON ELEPHANT CONSERVATION IN ASSOCIATION WITH SAVE THE ELEPHANTS, THE CHARITY'S CEO FRANK POPE SHINES A LIGHT ON THE CHALLENGES BEING FACED BY THESE MAGNIFICENT CREATURES – AND WHAT'S BEING DONE TO PROTECT THEM

Tucked away in a secluded corner of Samburu National Reserve – one of Kenya's most spectacular protected parks – a group of dedicated Kenyan and international researchers is working tirelessly to give wild African elephants a voice.

For nearly three decades, Save the Elephants (founded by the world's foremost expert on pachyderms, Iain Douglas-Hamilton) has been at the forefront of ground-breaking research on Samburu's elephant population. Their research not only sheds light on the intricacies of elephants' lives, but also formulates strategies to safeguard the world's largest land mammals.

The Samburu elephant population is one of the best-studied in the world. Researchers can identify up to 700 individual elephants by sight, utilising distinctive features such as ear nicks and tusk patterns. These elephants are also given individual and family names like Anwar, Soutine, the Spice Girls and the Royals, for easy identification.

It's not uncommon for visitors to Samburu National Reserve to see Save the Elephants' vehicles – with their distinctive black and white elephant logos emblazoned on the side – following sizable herds of elephants and solitary bulls. Inside, researchers are diligently observing and documenting every step of these intelligent and sentient beings.

This on-the-ground data collection has contributed to more than 120 peer-reviewed papers by Save the Elephants' researchers. Their research not only deepens our understanding of elephants, but also highlights how much in common elephants have with humans. Surprisingly, elephants share striking

similarities with us: they possess complex brains, vast intelligence, engage in rituals to mourn their dead and celebrate birth, and form deep social bonds.

TACKLING THREATS

Africa's wild elephant populations, including those in northern Kenya, face severe threats from ivory demand, habitat loss and human-elephant conflict.

Despite these challenges, conservation efforts led by organisations like Save the Elephants are making significant strides. Poaching has markedly declined in Kenya, with a focus on fostering harmonious coexistence between elephants and communities a top priority.

Save the Elephants' holistic approach involves safeguarding elephant migratory routes, working with governments and other agencies to enact protective laws, deploying rapid response units for conflict resolution, and developing solutions to prevent elephants from raiding crops in rural areas.

HARNESSING TECHNOLOGY

Save the Elephants utilises satellite tracking collars to gain insights into elephants' perspectives, and currently tracks more than 450 elephants across Africa. This technology has unveiled some remarkable stories showcasing elephants' adaptive survival strategies. They include the purposeful journey of a bull elephant called Morgan, who was tracked from coastal Kenya to southern Somalia in 2016, making him the first elephant known to visit that country in over 20 years. In 2020, a collared female named Koya made a remarkable journey through former 'badlands' in Northern Kenya – suggesting elephants are starting to feel safe again. ➡



DAVID LETITIYA/SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

The STE WildTracks app and EarthRanger software revolutionise real-time monitoring, enabling researchers to protect elephants effectively. High-tech tracking complements low-tech solutions, like beehive fences, providing both protection and income for communities coexisting with elephants.

Tracking technology gives elephants a voice, revealing how they adapt to different locations, circumstances and threats. Aerial surveys and patrols also play a crucial role in assessing the well-being of elephant populations and can be utilised for strategic planning to safeguard elephant corridors.

BUILDING A HARMONIOUS FUTURE

As human populations grow, elephants face increasing pressure due to habitat loss. Our Human-Elephant Coexistence (HEC) teams continue to explore and implement sustainable solutions.

With the expansion of farmlands into elephant rangelands, and the fragmentation of habitats due to developments, elephants are running out of space to freely move, leading to conflict with people. This conflict is further exacerbated by the obstruction of elephant corridors and erratic weather patterns, such as the recent drought that affected several parts of the country.

Drawing on the success of Save the Elephants' award-winning beehive fence project – which has now been adopted in 90 sites in 23 countries across Africa and Asia – Save the Elephants' launched the Human-Elephant Coexistence (HEC)

Toolbox in 2022 to tackle such conflict with peaceful methods.

The Toolbox enables rural communities to protect their lives and livelihoods from elephants in conflict hotspots. Comprising more than 80 tried-and-tested elephant-friendly deterrents, it has been shared with hundreds of organisations across Africa. The STE team also conducts workshops in Kenya to equip community representatives with the knowledge and tools necessary to teach others how to live more in harmony with elephants.

JOINING HANDS FOR JUMBOS

Through its school outreach programme, STE provides bursaries and scholarships to children living in human-elephant conflict hotspots. In the last 30 years, more than 20,000 children in 27 schools have engaged with our educational activities in northern Kenya, with STE awarding more than 359 student scholarships. We hope this will inspire future ambassadors for elephants and their environment, as well fostering coexistence between elephants and communities.

By merging collaboration, research, education and technology, Save the Elephants remains steadfast in its commitment to protect Africa's wild elephants, ensuring their survival for generations to come. 🐘

Left: Human-elephant conflict is one of the main threats to elephants today and increasing livestock numbers is a major cause of this conflict in northern Kenya

Below, Top to bottom: Save the Elephants researchers monitor elephant behaviour on daily basis to gain insight into their world;

A bull elephant under the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR). The SGR cuts through the Tsavo Conservation Area and has split the natural habitat of the country's single largest elephant population

A wildlife corridor in northern Kenya identified using STE's tracking data. Protecting key passageways for elephants ensures they can freely roam



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For more information...

OR TO MAKE A DONATION TO SAVE THE ELEPHANTS, GO TO SAVETHEELEPHANTS.ORG OR SCAN THE QR CODE

Right: Koya (bottom right) and her family, seen here, made a 48-mile trek traversing a danger zone once troubled by tribal conflict and ivory poaching

FRANK POPE/SAVE THE ELEPHANTS