

Elephant Behaviour

Elephants are very social animals. Elephants travel in herds, containing about 6 to 30 individuals. The herd is made up of the oldest female (the matriach), females and their offspring.

The African elephant is the largest living land mammal, one of the most impressive animals on earth. Of all its specialized features, the muscular trunk is the most notable it serves as a nose, a hand, an extra foot, a signalling device and a tool for gathering food, siphoning water, dusting, digging and a variety of other functions. Not only does the long trunk permit the elephant to reach as high as 23 feet, but it can also perform movements as delicate as picking berries or caressing a companion. It is capable, of powerful twisting and coiling movements used for tearing down trees or fighting. The trunk of the African elephant has two finger-like structures at its tip, as opposed to just one on the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*).

The tusks, another noticeable feature, are greatly extended incisors (elephants have no canine teeth); about one-third of their total length lies hidden inside the skull. The largest tusk ever recorded weighed 214 pounds and was 138 inches long. Tusks of this size are not found on elephants in Africa today, as over the years hunters and poachers have taken animals with the largest tusks. Because tusk size is an inherited characteristic, it is rare to find one now that would weigh more than 100 pounds.

Both male and female African elephants have tusks, although only males in the Asiatic species have them. The growing of the Tusks for many elephant is the sign of the whole body growth. Elephants are "right- or left-tusked," using the favoured tusk more often as a tool, thus, shortening it from constant wear. Tusks will differ in size, shape and direction; researchers use them (and the elephant's ears) to identify individuals.

Elephants can live in nearly any habitat that has adequate quantities of food and water. Their ideal habitat consists of plentiful grass and browse.

An elephant spends about 16 hours of the day to eating and about threes to five hours to drinking, bathing, dusting, wallowing, playing and resting. As an elephant only digests some 40 percent of what it eats, it needs great amounts of vegetation (approximately 5 percent of its body weight per day) and about 30 to 50 gallons of water. A young elephant must learn how to draw water up into its trunk and then pour it into its mouth. Elephants eat an extremely varied vegetarian diet, including grass, leaves, twigs, bark, fruit and seedpods. The fibrous content of their food and the great quantities consumed makes for large volumes of dung.

African elephants are distinguished from Asian elephants in several ways, the most noticeable being their ears. Africans' ears are much larger and are shaped like the continent of their origin. The African is typically larger than the Asian and has a concave back. Both African males and females have external tusks and are usually less hairy than their Asian cousins.

African elephants have traditionally been classified as a single species containing two different subspecies, namely the savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*),

Under the new two species classification the savannas elephant refers to as the largest of all elephants as well as the all land animals in the world standing up to 4 m (13 ft) at the shoulder and weighing approximately 7,000 kg (7.7 tons). The average male stands about 3 m (10 ft) tall at the shoulder and weighs about 5500–6000 kg (6.1–6.6 tons), the female being much smaller. Most often, Savanna Elephants are found in open grasslands, marshes, and lakeshores. They range over much of the savannas zone south of the Sahara.

The other suggested species is the Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*). Compared with the Savannas Elephant, its ears are usually smaller and rounder, and its tusks thinner and straighter and not directed outwards as much. The Forest Elephant can weigh up to 4,500 kg (10,000 lb) and stand about 3 m (10 ft) tall.

At the age of 14 years the males will leave the herd and group together with other males of the same age or older. When the group comes across a female, also called cow, the male of the highest rank is selected as the one to breed

A female is ready to breed at the age of 12, at which she is in an oestrus period. When in an oestrus period the female breeds with visiting males. After a period of 18 months, the female will give birth to a single offspring. The offspring can weigh up to 27 lbs.

The offspring feeds off its mother for 3 years until it is able to feed itself.

When it comes to taking care of the offspring, the mother is the main caretaker. When it comes to defend the offspring from predators or other bullying the entire herd pitches in to keep the young safe. Every offspring is essential to the power of the herd, since they mates once in every year.

The female elephant give birth to a new offspring 5 year later after caring of the past offspring. The young elephant will learn by watching and copy

from the act of the others. It will learn how to eat and drink with its trunk, and what to do and not to do.

Tusks of the young elephant begins to erupt at 16 months but do not show externally until 30 months; when its tusks are 5 or 6 inches long, they begin to disturb the mother and she weans it. Once weaned usually at age 4 or 5, the calf still remains in the maternal group.

The average life span of an elephant is between 60 and 70 years.

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