



Elephants



YOUR FIELD REPORT
ISSUE 11





We caught up with Ivy and her five-month-old calf with the rest of her herd at Lemek Conservancy, where they were enjoying the water and nutritious grasses in the swampy areas



Hello!

Welcome to your latest elephant update



Joel Muinde,
communication
coordinator, WWF-Kenya

Your support helps us collar elephants in the Maasai Mara National Reserve so we can track their movements and keep them safe. But we also need to see them regularly to make sure they're healthy. Recently, we

were delighted to find all the elephants enjoying the season's lush greenery, with lots of new calves. A flourishing elephant population can create challenges for the people who share the landscape – we also saw damage to a bean farm and a water pan. Thanks to your support, we can help respond to, and prevent, incidents like these. Turn over to hear how you're making a difference. **Mpaka wakati ujao.**

↪ (This means 'until next time' in Swahili!)



FIELD NOTES

Loita Forest covers around 330 sq km

FORESTS OF LIFE

Your support has helped count elephants in a vital but under-studied forest habitat

Rising from the Great Rift Valley that cuts through Kenya's highlands, the Loita Forest is a maze of ancient, gnarly trees giving way to wide, open plains. It's home to rare wildlife including pangolins, leopards and African wild dogs, and is a crucial corridor for migrating elephants.

Given its wildlife riches, it is perhaps surprising that Loita's elephant population has only ever been surveyed once. That is, until now. Thanks to the donations, we supported the Wildlife Research and Training Institute to build a clearer picture of elephants in the forest by counting the clues these massive mammals leave behind: their dung!

In these thick forests, it's much easier to count dung than see elephants, and knowing how often elephants poo and

how fast their dung piles decay enables us to estimate their numbers. The results of the survey revealed that an estimated 659 elephants roam the Loita Forest during the wet season – that's roughly one elephant every square kilometre.

Ancestral guardians

This ancient forest isn't just a vital refuge for wildlife. It's equally irreplaceable for the 20,000 Maasai people living in and around it, as a source of water, wood and medicinal plants, as well as a fallback grazing area during the dry season. The community reveres the forest as a spiritual place and performs traditional rites among the trees. For as long as they've been around, the Maasai have protected and sustainably managed



Loita Forest is one of the last remaining old-growth forests in Kenya

CLEVER CAMERAS



Elephants can pose a threat to people's livestock, crops and even their lives. So thanks to your donation, we're supporting trials of some pioneering tech that we hope will help keep everyone safe.

Our partners are testing an AI-powered camera system that could detect, identify and deter predators and crop-raiding elephants.

This 360° camera can be placed in a livestock enclosure, crop field or near buildings to scan for animals. If a predator is spotted, it's hoped the system can send an alert to landowners and trigger a harmless deterrent, such as flashing lights or an alarm, to scare it away.

these ancient forests under the guidance of their spiritual leader, the Oloibon.

Despite its cultural and environmental significance, the Loita Forest is under pressure. Climate change is drying up rivers and turning rich grazing to dust, while a growing human population drives the conversion of forest to farmland. Fences now crisscross the land, barriers that don't just mark property but also block ancient migratory routes. The forest isn't

officially protected, leaving it vulnerable to damaging activities such as overgrazing, logging and poaching. The latest survey mapped out these pressures and the human settlements, and it was clear that elephants avoided the worst-affected areas.

Your support is helping us work with the Maasai to protect Loita Forest. We're supporting local communities to reclaim the right to look after the forest and manage its resources sustainably, as they have done for generations. We're also introducing energy-efficient cooking stoves to reduce the demand for firewood, and setting up community-led patrols to help tackle conflict between growing populations of people and wildlife. All this crucial work wouldn't be possible without supporters like you. Thank you.



One, poo, three...



Polaris is in good health



The Maasai's pastoralist lives are woven into the fabric of the land

Joel



A FAMILY AFFAIR

Elephants have a complex social structure, so it's a long job to raise a calf to fit in with the herd

When the rains come, mature elephants become almost different animals – ones that are driven by the instinct to breed. Females (cows) that might have stopped ovulating during the dry season now maximise their chances of conceiving by coming into oestrus (heat) during the wet season of abundant food, when they're most likely to ovulate.

Adult males are supercharged by levels of testosterone that will be many times higher than during the dry season. They come into a heightened state called musth – often producing tarry secretions from glands on the sides of their heads – and their behaviour becomes unpredictable and aggressive, particularly towards other males.

Given that elephants have the longest gestation of any animal – an eye-popping 22 months – females often give birth early in that fertile wet season two years after mating. Female relatives support the mother around the birth, freeing the newborn from its foetal membrane or helping the calf find its feet. And a newborn isn't to be trifled with: an African elephant

calf weighs in at around 120kg – almost double a standard washing machine.

The magic of milk

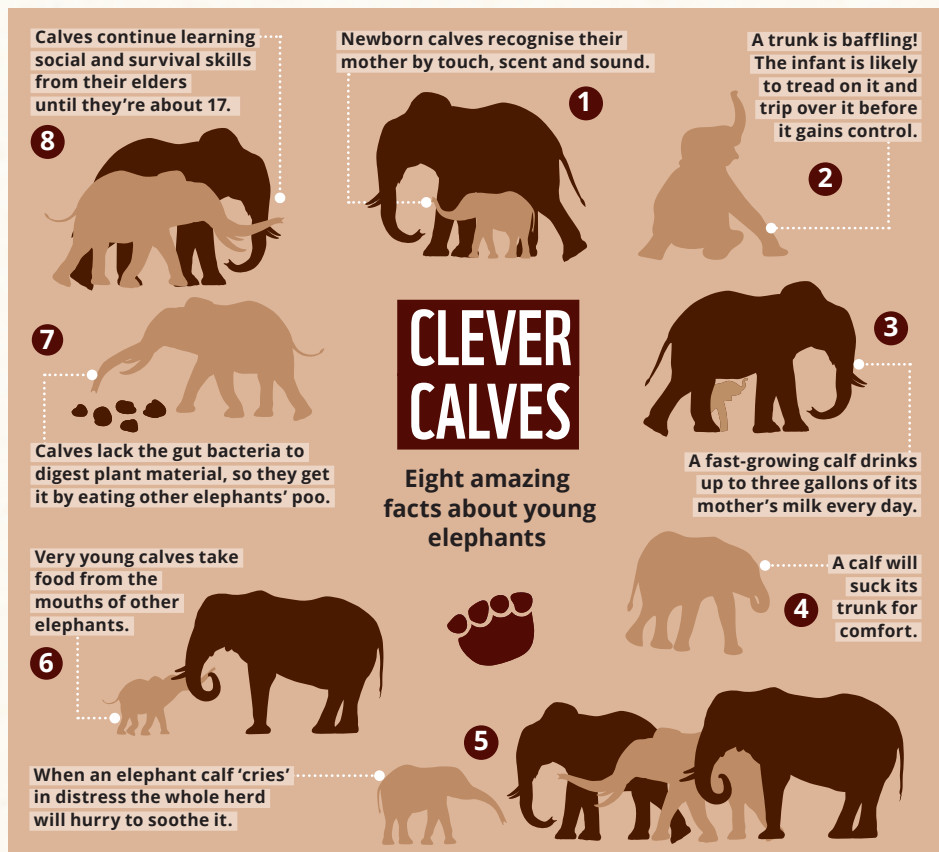
By giving birth in the wet season, a female has plentiful food to fuel those critical first months of lactation. She has breasts between her front legs that are the size and shape of large human breasts. In a matter of minutes, the calf is standing and suckling. Milk will be its main sustaining food for the next two years and the calf won't be weaned until it's three or four years old.

The mother will devote her full attention to her young, not giving birth again until it's four or five years old. If she dies during those earliest years, the calf is unlikely to survive, as a lactating cow won't suckle another calf at the expense of her own.

Within an hour of its birth, the calf is able to walk, and within two days it will be ready to follow the adult elephants in their nomadic life. All through the crucial first months and years, a mother and her calf are inseparable, rarely more

Elephant mothers are very nurturing, supportive and protective of their calves





than a trunk-length apart. Even when the calf begins to eat for itself at around six months old, it will do so by reaching its trunk inside its mother's mouth and grabbing some of the solid food that she's gathered (a useful way for the calf to learn which food is safe). Later on, the youngster watches other members of the herd to see what they're eating and follows their example. By the age of six, a young elephant will weigh about a tonne. Young female African elephants may

maintain a lifelong attachment to their mother. Sisters and aunts might also be part of this ongoing sisterhood, and these nurturers provide valuable lessons to the young females for when they too become mothers.

Finding independence

When the herd reaches a certain size, a cluster of young cows may break away, though these splinter groups often stay around the matriarch's herd. Female

groups are much smaller in forest elephants, usually only the cow and her offspring. But females may gather in larger groups in forest clearings when there's more food.

Bull elephants live a less mutually supportive life. Once they reach puberty – at 12-14 years old – male African elephants choose to leave or are driven away from the herd. Bachelor males collect in groups of varying sizes – herds numbering several hundred individuals have been seen

DID YOU KNOW?

Elephant calves show signs of gendered play. Males practise head-to-head sparring, while females run through long grass and chase birds.

in Botswana. But those groups are never more than temporary. African bulls also spend short periods of time on their own.

Male Asian elephants break away from the family group at between six or seven years old, and will remain solitary for the rest of their lives. Only when they visit a female to mate will they briefly associate with another elephant.



MELTING POINT

Sea ice supports incredible wildlife at both poles, but it's disappearing before our eyes

Our planet's north pole is surrounded by a vast frozen sea. Life in the Arctic depends on this sea ice. Caribou migrate across it. Polar bears

use it as a platform from which to hunt seals. The algae that forms beneath its surface supports an ecosystem teeming with wildlife, including beluga whales and narwhals.

At the opposite pole, in Antarctica, emperor penguins need 'fast' (stable) sea ice to raise their chicks on, while beneath the surface, under the ice, krill breed in enormous numbers. These tiny, shrimp-like creatures are a cornerstone of the Southern Ocean's food web, providing food for everything from fish and seals to Adélie penguins and blue whales.

Sea ice also helps cool the planet as it reflects the sun's rays back into space. But greenhouse gases caused by human activities have raised temperatures globally,

which is having a huge impact in polar regions. Sea ice is forming later, breaking up sooner and becoming thinner – with devastating consequences for wildlife and for humankind.

In the Arctic, shrinking ice means polar bears are forced to spend more time on land, where hunting opportunities are limited. In Antarctica, four of the five known emperor penguin colonies in one area experienced breeding failure in 2022 when thousands of chicks died – the ice broke up before they'd grown their waterproof feathers. These and other polar species are facing an uncertain future.

It's vital that the average global temperature rise is kept below 1.5°C, otherwise the Arctic could be ice-free every summer by the middle of this century.

What happens next depends on the actions we take today to reduce carbon emissions. With your support, we're pushing for urgent global climate policies to keep warming in check.

DO ONE THING!

Cut your carbon

Try to increase the proportion of delicious plant-based foods in your diet



Antarctic sea ice is vitally important for all the wildlife living on, under and around it. From tiny krill to vast whales, their survival depends on keeping global warming under 1.5°C



MAKE A CHANGE

Visit our website to find more ways to help nature every day
[wwf.org.hk/en/cities/footprint/](https://www.wwf.org.hk/en/cities/footprint/)



Working to sustain the natural
world for people and wildlife
為人類及野生生物延續大自然
together possible. wwf.org.hk

WWF.ORG.HK

© 1986 Panda symbol WWF ® "WWF" is a WWF Registered Trademark

© 1986 熊貓標誌 WWF, ® "WWF" 是世界自然基金會的註冊商標

WWF-Hong Kong, 15/F Manhattan Centre, 8 Kwai Cheong Road, Kwai Chung N.T. Hong Kong

香港新界葵涌葵興路8號萬泰中心15樓世界自然基金會香港分會

Tel 電話: (852) 2526 1011 Fax 傳真: (852) 2845 2764 Email 電郵: wwf@wwf.org.hk

Registered Name 註冊名稱: World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong 世界自然(香港)基金會
(Incorporated in Hong Kong with limited liability by guarantee 於香港註冊成立的擔保有限公司)

As well as helping to safeguard elephants, you support our other vital work to help protect our beautiful planet and its wildlife. Thank you.