



Elephants



YOUR FIELD REPORT
ISSUE 12





The rains have turned the Maasai Mara into a lush landscape. It's green with new young growth, and your supported elephants are thriving



Hello!

Welcome to your latest elephant update



Daisy Kemboi,
project assistant,
WWF-Kenya

At the moment, Kenya's Maasai Mara is blessed with the rains and fresh green growth, and your supported elephants are flourishing. But drought is never far away and the La Niña climate phenomenon is making climate

extremes more frequent. Food and water become more scarce during dry spells, and elephants might leave protected areas and walk into nearby communities in search of nourishment. At these times, sharing the land with wildlife becomes an even greater challenge for people already struggling to grow crops and raise livestock. Turn over to read how you're helping protect people and elephants when they're forced closer together. **Mpaka wakati ujao.**

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



ON THE MOVE

You're helping elephants – and people – as they become closer neighbours

As I was writing your report, over a million wildebeest were on the move, making their annual migration to Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve. This epic spectacle sees vast herds arrive from Tanzania, following the lush grass that springs up after seasonal rains.

The thunder of their hooves and constant grunting prompted elephants to seek peace and quiet outside the reserve. But when elephants venture into neighbouring community lands, they can pose a risk to people and the crops that most families depend on.

Though many African elephants live in protected areas, around 80% of their range actually lies outside the boundaries of state-protected areas such as national parks and reserves. Here in the Greater

Mara ecosystem, there are around 2,600 elephants, and more than 1,000 of them make their home in neighbouring community lands.

Beyond borders

Your support helps us protect elephants wherever they roam – both inside and outside protected areas – and we're working with governments, local people and partners across Kenya and Tanzania to secure a future for this iconic species. For example, you've supported community initiatives that deter elephants from damaging crops, by placing beehives and chilli-rope fences around fields (elephants are scared of bees, and hate the smell of chilli!).

But these deterrents aren't enough on their own – elephants need more

Local communities often help the monitoring teams track down elephant herds



Mighty Kiambi



Tracking with tech



African elephants can travel up to 200km in a day

Elephants have an amazing ability to vanish into bushes

POWERFUL PROTECTION

Your support is helping protect elephants and people in Myanmar.

In the Ayeyarwady region, elephants sometimes damage crops, threatening farmers' livelihoods. Many farmers turn to electric fences, which, if they're not designed and installed properly, can be lethal for both people and wildlife.

We've supported villagers across the region to plan, install and maintain two solar-powered electric fences to protect their crops from elephants. The new fences, which protect an area the size of over 500 football pitches, are making a real difference to 157 households.

room to roam. That's why, since 2015, we've supported the strengthening of two community conservancies on the Mara reserve's borders, in areas where wildlife come and go from the protected areas. Conservancies are areas set aside by communities for wildlife, responsible tourism and other sustainable uses. They restore wild habitats and create jobs and income for people.

There are currently 15 community conservancies covering over 1,800 sq km in the Mara landscape, which have generated more than £3 million a year for local people. The conservancies we support benefit over 1,000 local landowners who lease their land for conservation, creating more space for elephants and other migratory wildlife.

Thanks to the GPS collars your donation supports, we're able to track the elephants and understand where herds roam. This helps us identify areas of habitat that are a priority for protection and reduce conflict with communities that share their landscape. Since your last update, you've supported a population survey of elephants and other wildlife in the Greater Mara, giving us an up-to-date picture of where to focus our conservation efforts. We'll let you know when we have the results. Thank you.

Daisy



Farmers worry about protecting their crops

Asian elephants have disappeared from much of their former habitat. They're now largely confined to isolated populations across 13 countries in south and south-east Asia



SQUEEZED OUT

In less than a human lifetime, Asian elephant numbers have more than halved. What's gone wrong? And what needs to be put right?

Across Asia, people have worshipped and exploited elephants for centuries. In Hinduism, the elephant-headed deity Ganesha is associated with wisdom and luck, though good fortune hasn't always favoured the animals themselves.

The world's most densely populated continent is squeezing out its biggest animal. A century ago, there were perhaps 100,000 Asian elephants ranging from the Persian Gulf to the island nations of the South China Sea. Today, there are probably far fewer than half that number, largely scattered in isolated populations. A study predicts 41% of current elephant habitat will be gone by the end of the century.

Asian elephants are at greater risk than their African cousins, and the main threat isn't poaching but the pressure of expanding human settlements and agriculture. An Asian elephant's home range can average up to 200 sq km, and this need to roam brings them into competition with humans. Managing this conflict of interests is a big challenge.

Compared to their African cousins, Asian elephants are smaller, with smaller ears. They have a single dextrous 'finger' at the

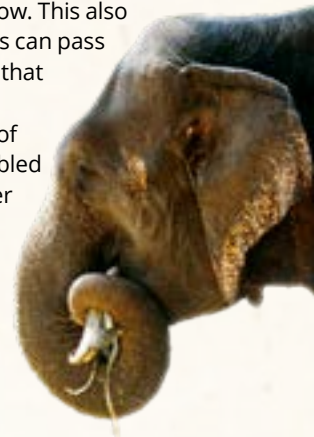
end of their trunk (rather than two), and a two-domed head rather than a rounded one. Only the males have tusks.

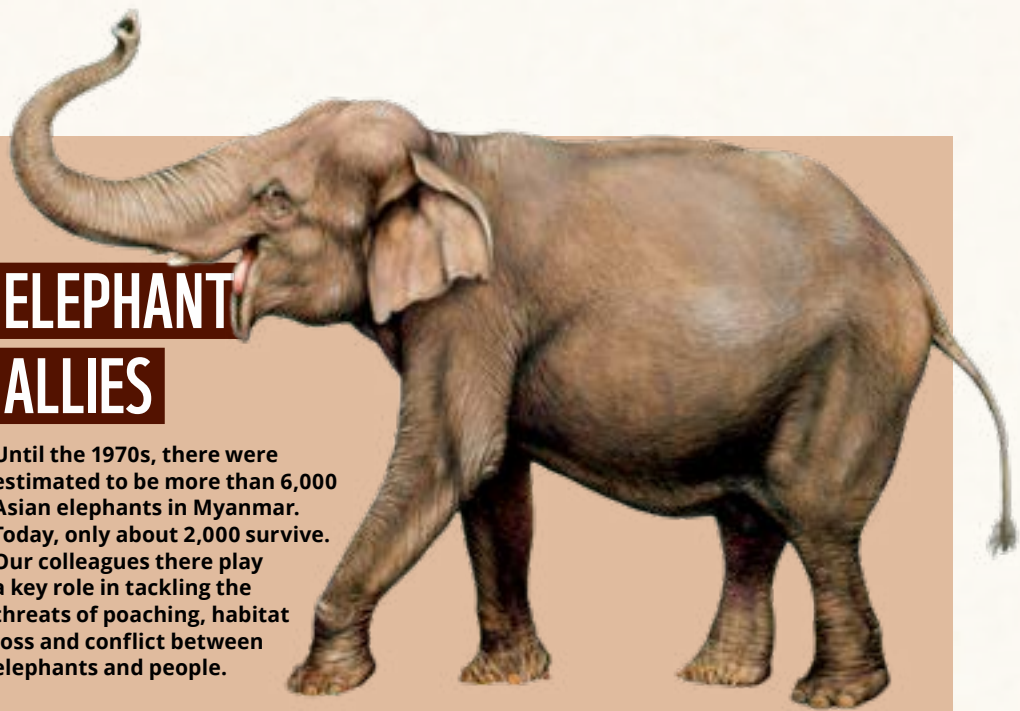
There are social differences too. Asian elephant herds are smaller, commonly only having six or seven related females, led by the oldest (the matriarch). Sometimes these small herds combine into much larger groups, but rarely for long.

Habitat managers

Elephants' ability to chomp through tough shrubs in grassy or scrub-heavy areas means these spaces are preserved to suit a variety of other herbivores. And the giant mammals' readiness to eat their way through thick forest allows the trees to develop a healthy, diverse age range. By clearing spaces, the elephants enable new young trees to grow. This also means smaller animals can pass through the corridors that elephants create.

The elephants' diet of coarse plants has enabled them to inhabit a wider range of habitats than smaller mammals, which are more particular about ▶





ELEPHANT ALLIES

Until the 1970s, there were estimated to be more than 6,000 Asian elephants in Myanmar. Today, only about 2,000 survive. Our colleagues there play a key role in tackling the threats of poaching, habitat loss and conflict between elephants and people.

We've helped set up camera traps around grasslands to monitor both the elephant populations and the health of their habitat.

We're supporting community-based teams to collect essential data on elephant populations to help prevent human-elephant conflict.

Local people have helped repair freshwater dams to ensure elephants have access to drinking water during summer droughts.

Organisations and villagers came together in 2023 to install solar-powered electric fences around 400 hectares of farmland to protect crops.

what they eat. Asian elephants prefer mostly low-lying areas where they can move around easily, and generally avoid steep slopes. They're found in 13 countries in south and south-east Asia, where expanding cities, industrial development and cultivation are eating into their former range.

While elephants can eat a wide variety of food, peoples' selective breeding of tasty and nutritious grasses make crops an irresistible draw. In India alone, an estimated half a million families are affected by elephants trampling or eating their crops. Such conflict can have

disastrous, sometimes fatal, consequences for both sides, so we're intensifying our efforts to promote coexistence.

Facing the threats

Since ivory poachers can only target male Asian elephants for tusks, this results in skewed sex ratios in some populations, which hampers breeding success. But poachers in Asia will kill elephants for their meat, skin and tail hair, too. Elephant skin is sought after for traditional medicine and for making beads and other trinkets. These items are sold as luxury goods or status symbols, further fuelling poaching.

The effects can be devastating. In the late 1980s and early '90s, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam lost 75% of their wild elephants, largely to poaching.

Climate change is also causing problems for elephants. Experts predict a rise in average temperatures in Asia of two degrees or more. There are signs that monsoons in India (where 50% of the continent's elephants live) are shifting north and occurring earlier. This will play havoc with elephants' breeding season.

Droughts caused by climate change in low-lying regions may force elephants

DID YOU KNOW?

African elephants have 21 pairs of ribs, while Asian elephants have 20.

towards higher ground where they can still find water, because they need to drink every day. Their future survival may depend on us creating wild corridors, so that elephants can move to suitable land during periods of drought.

We're already working to connect remaining habitats. On Borneo, our collaboration with a plantation company led to it setting aside over 1,000 hectares of land for a wildlife corridor to connect two key protected areas. These spaces will be vital for securing the future of Asian elephants and other wildlife. ■



Led by a matriarch, Asian elephant herds display strong family bonds, sophisticated communication and complex behaviour

A WORLD OF GOOD

Try a daily dose of nature to boost your mental and physical wellbeing

In fast-paced Hong Kong, many of us are living under constant pressure. Work, studies, family responsibilities and digital overload can take a real toll on both our emotional and physical wellbeing – particularly for young people growing up in an increasingly urban and screen-dominated environment.

Yet one of the most effective remedies lies closer than we think, often just beyond our doorsteps: nature.

How nature helps us feel better

An overwhelming body of evidence shows that connecting with nature is one of the best things we can do for our mental wellbeing. It helps us relax, lowers stress levels, boosts confidence, self-esteem and creativity, and helps us to find focus and emotional balance.

However, despite Hong Kong's rich biodiversity, stunning landscapes and easy access to country parks and beaches, recent studies show that Hong Kong people scored the lowest among 18 studied regions globally for the level of nature connectedness and well-being index.

While many people recognise that nature makes them feel better, busy urban lifestyles often leave little room to do so.

Let's reconnect with nature

At WWF, we believe that strengthening our connection with nature is essential – not only for our own wellbeing, but also for fostering greater care and action in protecting the natural world.

You don't need a long hike or a remote destination to make a difference. Spending just 20 minutes a day engaging with nature can make a massive difference to our mental wellbeing.

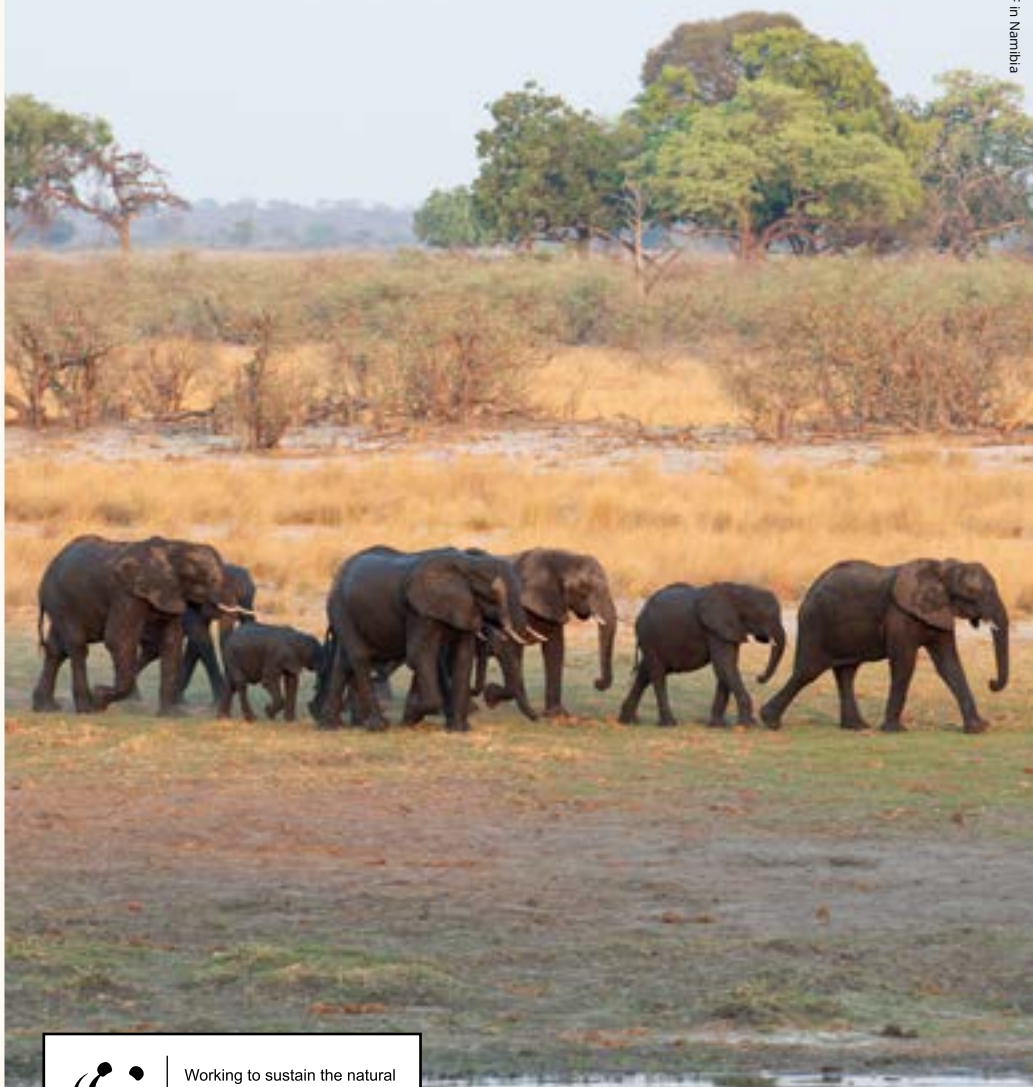
While spending time in the great outdoors is rewarding, you can also connect with nature when you're at home too – from growing herbs, listening to birdsong, to enjoying images of nature to bring a sense of calm to your day.

The great news is that many of the powerful mood boosters are totally free – as long as we look after our world. Let's restore nature, and let nature restore us– as long as we look after our world. Let's restore nature, and let nature restore us.

GET YOUR DAILY DOSE OF NATURE

Take a moment each day to reconnect with the natural world around you – for your own wellbeing, and for the planet we all share.





Working to sustain the natural world for people and wildlife
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As well as helping to safeguard elephants, you support our other vital work to help protect our beautiful planet and its wildlife. Thank you.