



The Elephant

Elephants are the largest land mammals in the world. They have a huge body, a large head, big ears and a long trunk. The trunk is actually its nose and part of its upper lip. It is used to breathe, to smell, to trumpet (the noise it makes), to grab things and to suck up water - it doesn't drink the water through its trunk but squirts it into its mouth or over its body when bathing. Elephants are very intelligent animals. They are also easily trained and are used as work animals, particularly in Asia. There are two species of elephant, the Asian and the larger African elephant. The African elephant has a fuller, more rounded head and bigger ears (said to be shaped like a map of Africa). The Asian elephant has a long tapered lower lip, while the African's is short and round. Both male and female African elephants have tusks (unless they have been deliberately removed to deter poachers), while only some male Asian elephants have tusks. The tusks are used for splitting bark, moving tree trunks and for display and defence.



Threat from Humans

The biggest threat to elephants are humans. They not only build and farm land on which elephants live but also hunt and kill elephants for their tusks. Elephant tusks, which are actually huge teeth, are made of ivory, prized as a decorative material by some. Since 1990 it has been illegal to sell ivory, unless it is very very old, but it is still sought-after. There has been a huge increase in poaching in recent years, despite many efforts to prevent it.

Facts for African Elephant

Sub-species: African Forest Elephant & African Savanna Elephant.

Height: 4 - 5 m.

Weight: 4 - 7 tonnes.

Colour: Grey.

Lifespan: 60 years.

Food: Bark, leaves, branches, grass and fruit.

Habitat: Grassy savanna plains.

Location: Central, eastern & southern Africa.

Status: Vulnerable.

Elephants and their family

Family is really important to elephants.

The mother, or most experienced of the females, is the head of the family and is known as the matriarch. She and



other females live together in a group, sometimes joining other groups to form large herds. Living together gives the females protection from predators such as lions, tigers and hyena. Baby elephants are particularly vulnerable to attack.

Male elephants live separately from the females but come together to breed.

A male elephant is called a **bull**, a female is called a **cow** and a baby elephant is called a **calf**.

Relatives & Ancestors

Elephants have no close relatives. The closest appears to be a surprisingly small animal called the Hyrax (or Dassie), a small furry mammal native to Africa.

The elephant has a well-known ancestor - the mammoth - a very large mammal that looked similar to today's elephant. Mammoths lived about two million years ago. The population started to dwindle about 10,000 years ago, finally becoming extinct 4,500 years ago. Some mammoths have been found preserved in ice and in frozen soil in Alaska and Russia, giving us lots of information about these ancient animals.

Hyrax



Mammoth

