

# The EB Family

## By Mark Sowers

It is so rare that someone bothers to study and get to know an individual wild animal. So rare for someone to want to immerse themselves into the animal's everyday life and try to understand every facet of their behavior. One of these special people is Cynthia Moss. Who is the animal? Echo, the elephant, and her family, 25 of well over 1,000 elephants Moss has dedicated her life to.

Cynthia, a now famous elephant researcher, began her studies in Amboseli National Park in southern Kenya in 1972. In late 1973, she recorded a family of seven members led by a matriarch with two U-shaped nicks in her right ear. In April 1974, Cynthia and a colleague radio collared the matriarch of the family, which was by then known by the codename EB. The matriarch was soon named Echo because of the sound her radio collar made. The researchers quickly learned that Echo usually led her family within a small home range centering on the Ol Tukai Orok woodlands and the Longinye Swamp in the center of the park near Cynthia's research camp. She rarely took her family out of the park, which may have been a wise decision. During that time period, poachers would kill elephants when they traveled in large aggregations of several families out of the park in the rainy season. Wise even then when she was fairly young, Echo probably protected her family with her conservative movements. It may even be one of the reasons she is still alive today.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the EBs continued to live their quiet life in Amboseli, casually observed and studied by Cynthia and other researchers that worked with her. In other areas of Africa, however, other elephants did not have such a happy life. They were being poached at an alarming rate, whole populations wiped out from the huge old bulls to the tiniest calves. Amboseli remained virtually undisturbed, the park being too crowded with tourists and researchers for poachers to operate. Only hours away, though, Tsavo National Park was ravaged by poachers, and its elephants were killed by the thousands. Cynthia and other researchers began to work internationally to save the elephants. If there was any hope to stop the ivory trade, elephants had to be moved up from Appendix II to Appendix I on CITES. This would ban the sale of any ivory in any country in the world. The problem was convincing people that elephants were in danger of extinction. Cynthia described how much in danger elephants were in her book Elephant Memories. Finally, in 1989, CITES chose to move both elephant species to Appendix I. Cynthia, however, believed the world still needed to learn a great deal about elephants and understand how important they are. She decided that the best way to accomplish this was to present the public with the story of an elephant family who lived a happy, normal life. Amboseli was the perfect place to tape a documentary about this elephant family. The different researchers discussed which family would be best for a documentary. Cynthia already knew the perfect family.

## The EBs as Movie Stars

In 1990, Cynthia Moss and Martyn Colbeck began the documentary that would make the Amboseli elephants, namely the EBs, internationally famous. They would follow Echo and her family for 18 months, recording their everyday experiences in their home of Amboseli. On February 28, 1990, they discovered Echo shortly after she had given birth. The calf, a male soon named Ely, was quite large and it was soon clear that he could not stand properly. He was forced to shuffle around on his front knees for three days before being able to stand. During the entire ordeal, his mother Echo and older sister Enid never left his side. The film recorded many other important events in the family's life, including their survival through a drought. The documentary, "Echo of the Elephants" ended in June 1991, leaving Cynthia wanting to show people more of their story, which was very well received by the public.

## A Second Film

Therefore, a short time later, Cynthia and Martyn began a sequel, "Echo of the Elephants: The Next Generation". The new story opened with Edwina's, Echo's granddaughter, first time in estrous and the ensuing mating. A short time later, Ely contracted a disease that affected his ability to walk. Cynthia was upset to see Ely suffering again, but once again he recovered well. In 1994 an event was about to happen in the family that Cynthia did not want the cameras to miss. Echo was about to give birth again. After many nights of a round-the-clock watch, Echo gave birth to a perfectly healthy female calf. The calf, which was named Ebony, was a very precocious and curious calf who wandered around exploring her home, making her an instant star. This portion of the story ended in 1996 leaving the family to their normal lives for seven years.

## Recent News of the EBs

Since the second film was completed, much has happened to the EBs. In August 2000, Echo gave birth to yet another calf. She was then about 55 years old! Next, Ely, who had grown a lot, became independent, leaving his mother's family. The family continued to grow steadily, and in 2002 a third documentary about the family was started. In December, Echo's daughter Eliot gave birth to a calf, which was named Emilio after Kenya's new president. In late March, Echo came into estrous; she was about 58 and will be nearly 60 when she gives birth. In April, 2003, Echo's adult daughter Erin was speared right in the park. She survived for over three weeks, and was treated twice by Kenya Wildlife Service veterinarians.

They were finally forced to euthanize her on May 21. She left as her orphans her two year old male calf E-mail, five year old Erica, and eight year old Echeri.

## Past and Present Family Members

Echo was supposedly born in 1945 and has been the matriarch of the EB family for at least 30 years. Her oldest positively known calf was Erin, a daughter born about 1969. Her next calf was Eamon, a male born in 1976. Then Enid, another daughter, born in January 1982. Three years and three months later, Eliot, yet another daughter was born in April 1985. Ely, Echo's famous son, was born crippled in 1990, which was documented in "Echo of the Elephants". Four years later, during "Echo of the Elephants: The Next Generation" Ebony, a daughter, was born. Most recently, Emily Kate was born August 3, 2000. The honor to name her was auctioned, and actor Martin Clunes won the honor. As an aid to the Amboseli Elephant Research Project, she can be adopted through the Born Free Foundation.

Emily was born about 1950 and she was probably Echo's younger sister. She was the second oldest female in the family when it was first recorded. At that time her oldest calf was a son called "Little Male", supposedly born in 1968. Her next calf, a daughter named Eudora, was born in 1972. She had a calf in 1976 that died shortly after birth and its sex was not recorded. Emo, another son, was born in 1980. He continued to nurse after his younger sister was born in 1983, which may have been a cause of her death during a drought in 1984. Her final calf, a male who was called Edo, was born in 1989 and was six months old when Emily died from eating human garbage. Edo was in danger of starvation and was captured and raised at an orphanage in Nairobi. He was released into the wild and is currently in Tsavo National Park with the orphans he was raised with.

Ella is the current second oldest female in the family and was born about 1965. She is four years older than Echo's oldest known calf Erin, and it was at first not known whether she was Echo's sister or daughter. It has since been proved through DNA that she is Echo's sister. She had her first calf at age 12, a male named Eric. Her next son Ewan was born in 1982. Emma, Ella's first daughter was born in 1987. Three years later, during a drought in 1990, Esau, another son, was born. In 1995, Elettra, a second daughter, was born. Emmet, a fourth son, was born in 1999. Her latest calf, a male, was born in early 2003.

Erin, Echo's 1969 daughter, had her first calf, Edwina, in August 1982. Two years and seven months later, the shortest calving interval recorded, Eleanor was born in March 1985. Edgar, a son, was born in 1988. In 1991 Erwin, another son, was born. Erin's third daughter Echeri was born in 1995. Erica came along in 1998, her fourth daughter. E-mail, a son born in 2001, would be Erin's last calf. He was 20 months old when his mother was speared and died. He was young and

still nursing, but has survived up until the present time. He has been cared for by Echeri, Ebony, and Eliot. Echeri and Erica have also been deeply affected.

Eudora, Emily's daughter, had her first calf, a daughter named Elspeth, in 1988 at age 17. Then, in 1989 her mother Emily died and she grieved with her siblings, daughter, and the rest of the family. As a young mother, she could not support her daughter and her youngest brother Edo at the same time, and Edo had to be relocated. She had a son named Eldon in 1996. Her most recent calf, another son, was born in November 2002.

Enid, Echo's daughter, was born in January 1982. She was always interested in calves and was an ardent allomother, or babysitter, especially to her younger brother Ely. Her first calf, a son named Ejac, was born in 1997. She had a daughter born in 2001 who died in January 2003.

Edwina, Erin's oldest daughter, had her first calf, Europa, in 1995. She gave birth to Elaine in 1999. Earlier this year she had to grieve her wonderful mother Erin's death. On Christmas Day, 2003, Edwina gave birth to another calf.

Eleanor, Erin's second daughter, had a son named Elmo in 1999. She, like her older sister, had to deal with the difficult loss of her mother.

Eliot, Echo's 1985 daughter, is one of Cynthia Moss's favorite members of the family, playful and fun loving. She had her first calf, of unknown sex, right inside Cynthia's research camp in 1998 when she was 13. It disappeared the next day, possibly killed by hyenas. Two years later, another calf was born, but it was weak and never stood. It too died. Finally, on December 3, 2002, Eliot gave birth to a strong, healthy, male calf who survived. He was named Emilio. Eliot has been very protective of this calf; she won't tolerate *anything* happening to him.

Emma, Ella's daughter, gave birth to a male calf in 1999 who died later in the year. On New Year's Day, 2004, she gave birth to another calf.

Elspeth, Eudora's oldest calf, had a son named Explorer in 2000.

The EB family is the most famous elephant family in the world. Their story, recorded in wonderful detail, has not only helped people decide to protect other wild elephants around the world. It has shown many people everywhere what elephants are like and taught about the daily life of elephants. They have shown just how emotional, caring, and intelligent elephants are. No person with any heart at all could buy ivory or support the ivory trade after seeing the story of a certain great matriarch and her wonderful family.



(L to R) Enid, Emily Kate, Echo, and Ejac Photo courtesy of Granli/Poole  
[www.elephantvoices.org](http://www.elephantvoices.org)

# A Current EB Family Tree

Echo ? (about 1945-)  
    Emily Kate ? (2000-)  
    Ebony ? (1994-)  
    Eliot ? (1985-)  
        Emilio ? (2002-)  
    Enid ? (1982-)  
        Ejac ? (1997-)  
    \*Erin ? (1969-2003)  
        E-Mail ? (2001-)  
        Erica ? (1998-)  
        Echeri ? (1995-)  
        Eleanor ? (1985-)  
            Elmo ? (1999-)  
        Edwina ? (1982 -)  
            ? (2003-)  
            Elaine ? (1999-)  
            Europa ? (1995-)  
\*Emily ? (1950-1989)  
    Eudora ? (1972-)

? (2002-)

Eldon ? (1996-)

Elsbeth ? (1988-)

Explorer ? (2000-)

Ella ? (1965-)

? (2003-)

Emmet ? (1999-)

Elettra ? (1995-)

Emma ? (1987-)

? (2004-)

\* Deceased mother of several calves.

### Bibliography and Acknowledgements

Echo of the Elephants ©1992

Cynthia Moss

[www.elephantvoices.org](http://www.elephantvoices.org)

“Echo of the Elephants”

Little Big Ears ©1997

Cynthia Moss

“Echo of the Elephants: The  
Next Generation”

[www.elephanttrust.org](http://www.elephanttrust.org)

Special thanks to Petter Granli and Soila Sayialel for giving me help on my writing, and for answering my questions and helping with my research.

Dedicated to Echo and her family for their inspiration and all they have taught me about elephants and their importance, and to Cynthia Moss, who told their story.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and a long, sweeping underline.