

THE HISTORY OF THE CB FAMILY

I first met the CB family on October 20, 1973. They were in a large aggregation of over 100 animals and all I could do was just photograph individuals. It took many more sightings over the next few years to begin to sort out who made up the family. In fact I did not see the family again until March 1975, but from that point on I began to see them regularly.

I have to admit that the CB family has always been one of my favorites. When I first got to know the family it had a marvelous, old matriarch who had large, droopy ears. She was eventually named Cassandra but I always called her "Droopy Ears". What I liked so much about her was that she was a very fierce defender of her family. Even as early as 1972 when I started the study in Amboseli, the elephants were very tolerant of vehicles. Having worked with Iain Douglas-Hamilton in Lake Manyara I was accustomed to being charged by the much more aggressive elephants there. I did not like being charged, but I did admire the bravery of those big females. In Amboseli the elephants hardly looked at my car when I drove up. Some of the families that used the Park less frequently ran away when I tried to approach, but the only family that regularly responded by charging was Droopy Ears's. Something unpleasant associated with a car must have happened to her in her long life and she was determined to defend her family from the danger she perceived. I liked her spirit.



*Calandre, Droopy Ears,
Christina & calves—
December 1973.*

During 1976 I got to know the family much better. A female who had been photographed with the family in 1973 had disappeared. She was simply called the

Big-Eared Female in the records and never got a proper name. The next oldest female to Droopy Ears was a handsome female whom I named Christina; I estimated her to be about 28 years old. The remaining members were all much younger. Most of them were adolescents and teenagers plus two calves of about three years old. These calves intrigued me because they appeared to be twins; at least they both seemed to follow Droopy Ears. The remaining adolescents and teenagers were very frustrating because they were extremely difficult to sort out, particularly the females, who all looked exactly alike to me.

To make the situation more confusing, the CB family spent a great deal of time with another family code-named OA, which was led by a beautiful female named Olga.

The rest of the females in the OA group were about the same age as the CB teenagers and they all had smooth ears and regular shaped tusks like the CBs, which made distinguishing them very difficult. However, I was able to photograph all of them and give them names, but even so there were times when I was still not sure if an individual was a CB or an OA. Eventually, I decided there were four teenaged females in the CB family and I named them: Chloe (smooth-eared, prominent veined, pointy headed), Celeste (also pointy headed, but beautiful with huge, almost sail-like ears), Calandre (smooth-eared, even tusks) and, not keeping to a C name, Raggedy (the most distinctive with the edges of her ears full of nicks and holes). By early 1976, the CB family appeared to consist of the following:

Droopy Ears	F	about 45 years old
C'72	M	3 ½ years old
C'72	F	3 ½ years old
Christina	F	about 28 years old
Raggedy	F	about 16 years old
Celeste	F	about 15 years old
Chloe	F	about 15 years old
Calandre	F	about 12 years old
Camilla	F	about 9 years
Male calf	M	about 7 years old
Four young males	M	ranging from 9-14 years old

In March 1976, the young female Celeste was recorded with a new calf, almost certainly her first. Two months later it was gone. The next month the female named Chloe gave birth to a calf, but it too disappeared a few months later. It turned out to be a dreadful year to be born. Amboseli experienced one of its periodic droughts, but this one was harsher than most. There was lower than average rain for three years and then very poor rain during 1976. By the late dry season of that year over half the calves had died.



Portrait of Celeste with her huge, beautiful ears

Also in 1976 there was considerable poaching and spearing in the Amboseli area. The poaching was carried out by non-Maasai interested in the ivory; the spearing was done by Maasai in frustration over their land being taken away from them and also because of competition with their cattle for grazing. In addition there was still sport hunting in the areas outside Amboseli. (It was banned the following year.) Altogether in 1976, 68 elephants died. Many of Amboseli's magnificent big males and some of the large females were killed. Among those who disappeared were

Droopy Ears and Christina. The CBs were left with no leader. The oldest member of the family was no older than 16 years old.

Over the next few years I got to know the CBs much better. After the tragic loss of their leader and second in command as well, the family almost disintegrated completely. I would find only two or three of them together, with another two somewhere else, and a third little sub-group in yet a different place. Most of young males went independent early, not having any real family to stay with. Nevertheless, eventually the females and some of the young males coalesced once more. It was never clear who took over as leader. Although I thought Raggedy was the oldest, she did not seem to act as a leader. The role of matriarch seemed to be taken on by both Celeste and Chloe who were the same age—15 years old—much too young to be leaders.

Fortunately, the 1976 drought broke in December with generous, rainfall and the elephants, adults and calves alike, gradually recovered. The next three years proved to be very favorable ones for the elephants, the Maasai and the Park. The rainfall was higher than average with the result that there was abundant and nutritious vegetation. In addition, the poaching that had occurred in the areas surrounding the Park came to end in 1977; sport hunting was banned in 1977; and in 1978 the Maasai warriors were promoted to junior elder, and with that change the incidents of spearing of elephants decreased dramatically. All in all it was a very peaceful and productive period for the elephants.

It was also a time for high spirits. One of the other reasons I have always been partial to the CBs is that the young females were a particularly playful bunch. Without the serious and somewhat angry-at-the-world Droopy Ears around, Celeste, Chloe, Calandre and Raggedy indulged in all the silliest elephant games. Their favorite was to get in long grass, rush around with their heads down and tails up attacking imaginary enemies. They made a huge amount of noise tearing through the grass while emitting deep, nasal play trumpets. That always brought a smile to my face.



The CBs were always a very tight-knit, but fun-loving family; here Chloe playfully rests her tusks on another

During the drought the females had stopped reproductive cycling altogether. However, as soon as conditions improved they began to come into oestrus again and mate. Since so few of the Amboseli females had young calves there were a lot of females ready to conceive. The result was a baby boom in 1979 and 1980. Only two calves had been born in Amboseli between January 1977 and November 1978. From November 25, 1978 to June 5, 1980, one hundred calves were born.

In the CB family the first females to contribute to the baby boom were Chloe and Calandre. They gave birth to a female and male respectively in December 1979. These newborns caused great excitement among the CBs since the last calves they had in the family were in 1976, and they didn't live for long, and before that in 1972. The new calves were excessively fussed over, fondled and probably spoiled. In 1980 Raggedy joined the other mothers with the birth of a son in February; and Celeste followed in March with a son as well. The CBs were finally a real family once again.

Celeste, Chloe, Calandre, Raggedy and calves in 1983



Conditions continued to be good for the Amboseli elephants for the next couple of years. Many of the females who had given birth in 1979 gave birth again in 1983. Chloe had a male in April and Celeste had a female in May. The population was growing rapidly. However, environmental conditions changed once again. In 1984 there was another severe drought. At the same time the Maasai had promoted a new warrior set and the combination of the drought and scores of young men out to prove their bravery was devastating for the elephants. In all 67 elephants died during 1984: 11 adult females, 13 adult males, three juveniles, 13 weanlings, five second-year calves, and 22 first-year calves.

Sadly, the CBs suffered losses during the drought. Celeste's '79 and Calandre's '80 male calves both died. Fortunately the drought ended in November with the coming of the rains and the elephants slowly began to recover. A young female whom I had named Camilla surprisingly gave birth to her first calf in October 1984 right at the peak of the drought, but with the onset of the rains she was able to produce enough milk and he survived. By the end of 1984 the family was made up of 13 members. In keeping with my system of naming calves when they are four years old, I had given names to the older calves. Until that time they are given codes based on their

mother's name and their year of birth. I had named the "twins" Craig and Cerise. The family consisted of the following individuals:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Month & Year of Birth
Chloe	F	1961
CH3	M	4-83
Charity	F	12-79
Celeste	F	1961
CE3	F	5-83
Raggedy	F	1960
RG0	M	2-80
Calandre	F	1964
CL3	F	5-83
Camilla	F	1967
CM4	M	10-84
Cerise	F	1972
Craig	M	1972

During the next few years Amboseli experienced average to higher than average rainfall and the CBs continued to produce more calves, but they also experienced some losses. In 1985 Raggedy gave birth to a healthy daughter and Cerise gave birth to her first calf, but it died within a month. The following year there were two tragic losses, both Calandre and Raggedy's '80 calf died. Calandre had been speared and died just on the periphery of my camp. Raggedy's '80 appeared to have died from an illness. A few months later after fighting for her life with no mother, Calandre's '83 female calf died.

Over the next five years life was fairly peaceful for the CBs. There were several more births and no deaths. In 1987, Celeste gave birth to a son; in 1988, Chloe gave birth to a daughter, and Cerise, who had lost her first calf, gave birth to a son who survived. Two years later in 1990 Camilla had a second male.

By now there was an interesting split in the family. Camilla, Cerise and their calves formed a small sub-family and moved on their own most of the time. Usually these splits occur when a family becomes too large to be socially and ecologically viable, but the CBs were not a big family so it was intriguing. One of the things about elephants that is so fascinating is that they don't fit into simple behavioral boxes. They do things for complex reasons relating to history, kinship and individual relationships.

In 1991 a new tragedy struck the CBs. Raggedy gave birth to a calf in January of that year, but two months later both she and her calf disappeared and were presumed dead. Her other calf Charlotte remained with the family. She was six years old at the time. Although Raggedy was part of the larger CB subgroup, Charlotte opted to join Camilla and Cerise.

After the loss of Raggedy, life went on with few changes over the next three years. Charity gave birth to her first calf at 13 years old, but as with many first mothers, her calf did not survive. However, she did not waste any time and in November of 1994 she gave birth to a new calf, which lived.

Very sadly the next loss was a serious one for the smaller subfamily. Camilla was speared and died in 1994 shortly after giving birth to a new calf. That death was the end of the budding new family of which she was the leader. Cerise and Charlotte went back to the original CBs led by Chloe and Celeste.

One of my favorite photos of the CBs; as they were crossing the plain a huge dust devil headed towards them; Chloe is at the rear.



The CB family continued to produce strong, healthy calves. Celeste gave birth to a daughter in January 1995. In the same month Celeste became a grandmother for the first time. Her daughter Cecilia had a son at age 11 and this calf survived. Chloe had a daughter in February 1996 and Cerise gave birth to a female in February 1997. During this same period, two of the young males in the family, Chloe's '83, named Calvin, and Camilla's '84, called Conor, left to strike out on their own. Typically young males leave around 12-14 years old so they were right on time.

There were no births in the family during 1998, but it was an excellent year for all the Amboseli elephants. Like the rest of Kenya, the park received a huge amount of rain courtesy of *El Nino*. There was a super-abundance of food and all the elephants grew positively fat on the lush vegetation. The elephants formed huge aggregations of 200-300 and there was a tremendous amount of play. Even the big adult females lost their dignity and ran around with the whites of their eyes showing attacking imaginary enemies in the long grass. It would be wonderful if it could always be like that, but nothing is predictable in African savannahs.

Towards the end of 1999 we began to see the results of *El Nino*. Baby elephants seemed to be raining from the sky. Up through October 1999 there were 63 births, which was expected, but in November and December we suddenly had a deluge of new calves. These were conceived 22 months before, starting in January 1998 when the *El Nino* rains were well underway and the elephants were in the best possible condition to breed. In the last two months of 1999 alone 48 more calves were born giving us an all-time record of 111 births for one year.

During 1999 the CBs produced four new calves. Chloe, Charity, Celeste and Charlotte all had calves. In the meantime several of the young males left to strike out on their own. In 2000 two more calves were born: Cecilia and Cerise both had male calves in May. However, 2000 turned out to be a terrible year because of a drought. At times like this the Maasai and the elephants are competing for the same meager resources, tempers become short, and conflicts occur. Fifteen elephants were speared and nine of them died before the drought ended in December. The CBs, under the wise leadership of Chloe and Celeste, avoided the Maasai and came through the drought unscathed. All the calves except Charity's '99 survived. By the end of 2000 the family consisted of the following:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Month & Year of Birth
Chloe	F	1961
Cathy	F	12-99
Carey	F	2-96
Chobe	M	5-92
Celina	F	4-88
Charity	F	12-79
Chanah	F	11-94
Celeste	F	1961
Carter	M	5-99
Connie	F	1-95
Cynodon	M	5-91
Chemosit	M	5-87
Cerise	F	1972
Christian	M	5-00
Campoare	F	2-97
Chyulu	F	12-93
Cecilia	F	5-83
Casey	M	5-00
Connolly	M	1-95
Charlotte	F	1-85
Carmela	F	5-99
Chandra	M	3-90

By 2001 Chloe and Celeste were 40 years old and were now experienced co-matriarchs. They had had a very rough time in the early days after losing their leaders, but considering the odds against two 15-year-olds succeeding, they did remarkably well. The family had grown to 22 members.

Chloe and Celeste had known each other since they were born. Their bond was very strong. Thus it was an enormous loss to Chloe when Celeste died in April 2005. It was a natural death but we don't know the cause. She became thin and

weak and there was nothing we could do for her. Chloe lost her close companion of 44 years. There was no one else in the family near her age. It's hard to say but I would venture to guess she missed Celeste and life was never the same again for her.

Chloe went on as matriarch continuing to lead her family in her gentle and wise way for the next four years. During that time the family prospered. Ten more calves were born including a daughter to Chloe. There were no deaths. The family continued to grow. It was a good time, but it was not to last. The horrific drought of 2009 descended on the CBs and nearly destroyed the family.

Chloe with her last calf in November 2008



The CBs were one of the hardest hit of all the families in Amboseli. Fourteen individuals died, including adults and calves. Chloe was one of the first of the four adults to die; she succumbed to the drought in July, followed by her daughter Celina in September, and her daughter Charity in November. Eleven calves died including Chloe's youngest. It was devastating not just to the elephants but to us researchers who knew this family so well. Because they were very central, easy to find, and easy to observe, the CBs were one of the groups we did more focused studies on. They were very special to all of us and it was extremely painful to watch them suffer.

As I write this history now in November 2010, the CBs are piecing themselves together again and trying to go on as best they can. As the oldest at 38 years Cerise has inherited the matriarch's role, but she and her sub-group still have a tendency to break from the others leaving the oldest in the Chloe section, Cecilia, as leader. She's 27 years old, which is young but nowhere near as young as Chloe and Celeste were when they had to take over their family. If there is peace and enough rain over the next years I think Cerise and Cecilia will be successful as well.

In the meantime, the CB family has several independent males out in the world of the bulls. The two oldest bulls from the family, Cira and Conrad, have not been seen for some time and we fear they have been killed. The next oldest is Craig who at 38 years old is very handsome bull. He is the one who may be Cerise's twin. We're hoping that he and some of the younger bulls coming up will pass on those CB genes that made for such wonderful elephants.

The family structure today:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Month & Year of Birth	Mother if Dead
Cerise	F	1972	Droopy Ears
Cotonou	M	11-04	
Christian	M	5-00	
Camparoe	F	2-97	
Chyulu	F	12-93	
Charlotte	F	1-85	Raggedy
Carmela	F	5-99	
Cecilia	F	5-83	Calandre
Cairo	M	11-04	
Chico	M	5-00	
Connie	F	1-95	Celeste
Carter	M	5-99	Celeste
Cathy	F	12-99	Chloe
Carey	F	2-96	Chloe
Chanah	F	11-94	Charity
Costinhna	F	12-02	Charity

The independent males:

Independent Males	Birth Date	Code No.	Mother
Cira	Jan-65	136	?
Conrad	Jan-65	182	?
Craig	Jan-72	221	Droopy Ears?
Calvin	Apr-83	375	Chloe
Conor	Oct-84	393	Camilla
Chemosit	May-87	436	Celeste
CokoZiko	Feb-88	459	Cerise
Chandra	Mar-90	486	Camilla
Cynodon	May-91	507	Celeste
Chobe	May-92	529	Chloe
Connolly	Jan-95	584	Cecilia

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