

THE HISTORY OF THE FB FAMILY

Freda of the FBs had one of the longest reigns as matriarch of any of the families in Amboseli. She was there when the family was first sighted on the second day of the project on September 2, 1972 and she continued as matriarch until she died in 2009. That made her very special to us. Freda's family is one of the best-known in the population. I have continuous records of its births and deaths, good times and bad times over the past 38 years.

In those first days Harvey Croze and I were trying to contact as many groups of elephants as possible and photograph at least the adult members. We drove out to the western part of the Park crossing the causeway over the Enkongu Narok swamp. Just along the shore we found a group of cows and calves. Unfortunately, they were disappearing into the deep swamp, but we managed to get a few photographs. When we developed the rolls of film in Nairobi we identified two females –one adult and one sub-adult--we assumed belonged to a single family. On that first trip we had seen and photographed seven definite families each of which we gave a letter of the alphabet. The first group was called the "A" family; the sixth group was given the letter "F". We named the larger female Freda and the younger one Fay.



An early ID photo of Freda

At that time we were working part-time and didn't see Freda and Fay again for four months and once again we could not see them well. We saw them one more time and then finally on October 5, 1973 we were able to spend some time with them and get better photos. They seemed to be in a sub-group of four within a larger group. In addition to Freda and Fay there was a tuskless female whom we named Flora. We noted that Freda had a female calf who appeared to be about 3-4 years old. From their ages we suspected that Fay and Flora were also Freda's daughters, but we could not be sure.

It would not be until the following year that we got a better idea of the composition of the family. We also had to make the decision that there were actually two F families. We had lumped all the individuals we had seen together as one family but subsequent sightings revealed that there were

two and possibly even three families. The section with Freda, Fay and Flora became the FBs. Later we assigned another sub-adult female to this family and named her Felicity. By the end of 1975 we had seen these individuals 26 times. We decided that the FB family consisted of the following five individuals:

Freda	Adult F around 25-30 years old
Fanny	F Calf about 6 years old
Fay	Young F around 10 years old
Flora	Tuskless F around 14 years old
Felicity	Young F around 11 years old

In September 1975 I had set up a permanent camp in the Park and began a full-time study. This change made it possible for me to gather more data on each of the families and I gradually got to know the FB family much better.

Freda was much older than anyone else in the family and clearly acted as matriarch. She determined the movements of her group and the others followed. I began to notice that Freda had an unusual personality. She continuously streamed fluid from her temporal gland, had some lumps on her side that she sometimes kicked at, and in general seemed a bit out of sorts all the time. I suspect something had happened to her; perhaps she had some buckshot or small bullets that had caused the lumps. I never found out what it was, but we know she wasn't ill because she lived many more years after I first noticed her ailment.

My observations showed that the FBs associated with the FAs, NAs, KAs and HAs and formed what we call a "bond group" with these other families. The four matriarchs of these other families were all big females in same age range as Freda. Also associating with the FBs were some younger females and for quite some time I thought these might belong to the FBs. The oldest among them were called Mary and Cup Ear and they were definitely a source of confusion. They were sometimes on their own, sometimes with the FBs and sometimes with one or the other of the families mentioned above. (Several years later they were assigned their own family letter, "FD".)

I saw the FBs frequently during 1976. On March 5, 1976 I found the family once again along the Ekongu Narok swamp. On this day there was a tiny calf only a few days old with them. It was a male and belonged to Flora. Both of the young females, Fay and Felicity, were taking a keen interest in the calf and helping Flora to take care of him.

The year 1976 turned out to be a bad one for the Amboseli elephants and other animals as well, because there was a very serious drought. It was also a time of heavy poaching and of spearing by Maasai. Over 60

elephants died that year. Of the 29 calves that were born to the whole population in 1976, 14 died before they were a year old. Of those that died, most were the victims of drought. It was sad and depressing watching these calves get weaker and weaker and then disappear. Their mothers had milk but probably not in great quantity or quality. What really seemed to affect the calves was the lack of suitable vegetation to feed on once they reached the age when they should have started to eat solid food. Calves start to eat a bit of grass when they are between three and four months old, and by the time they are eight months old they need quite a lot of food to sustain them. In 1976 as the drought progressed there was only swamp vegetation which the young calves had difficulty both handling and digesting. Many of the calves that had been born in the early part of the year died in September, October and November. There wasn't enough food for them or their mothers. Sadly, Flora's calf was one of the ones who didn't make it. He died in September 1976.

The drought broke at the end of 1976 and life began to look up for the FBs. Abundant rains fell during 1977, 1978 and 1979 making for a very good period for the Amboseli elephants. However, because of the previous drought years only two calves were born to the Amboseli population from January 1977 to November 1978. The birth rate was so low because females were not in good enough condition to reproduce. After the good rains fell, they gradually recovered and began to conceive. Twenty-two months later, in December 1978, an elephant baby boom began.



The FB family relaxed and happy with new calves after the end of the 1976 drought

The FBs joined this baby boom. Both Fay and Felicity were old enough to have calves but they had to build up some fat reserves first. Freda got back

into condition quickly and gave birth to a son in March 1979. With a 22 month gestation period this meant that she conceived in January 1977 just after the drought broke. Flora also didn't waste much time. Six months after her calf died she conceived again in March 1977 and in May 1979 gave birth to another male calf. Both of these calves survived.

The two young females took a little longer. Females can reproduce as young as 9-10 years old but this early age is very rare. Usually females have their first calves at 14 years old, but because of the drought Fay and Felicity were delayed. Fay gave birth to her first calf in February 1980 when she was 15. Felicity did not have her first calf until she was 19 in 1983. In the meantime, Flora gave birth to her third calf in June 1983, a healthy female.

However, the following year, 1984, experienced another severe drought which took a tremendous toll on the population. Many of the calves that had been born in 1983 died, and sadly, one of them was Felicity's calf. It was also in 1984 that Freda's five-year-old calf, who had been named Fritz, was speared and killed by the Maasai. Spearings are common during droughts when Maasai livestock and wildlife are in direct competition for the limited resources.

Fortunately, the drought ended and peaceful times came once again. Fay had given birth to her second calf in November 1984, but possibly because she was in poor condition and could not produce enough milk, this calf died in February 1985. There were two births in 1985. Freda's youngest daughter, whom we had named Fanny, gave birth to her first calf in April, but he died when he was only two months old. It is not uncommon for females to lose their first calf. In June of 1985 Freda gave birth to another son. We didn't know it at the time, but this turned out to be her last calf. By the end of 1985, the FB family consisted of the following, including newly named Fanny, Falstaff and Fawn (we name calves when they reach four years; until then they have codes based on their mother's names and their year of birth):

Individual	Sex	Month-Year of Birth Known or Estimated
Freda	F	1945
FRE85	M	6-85
Fanny	F	1969
Fay	F	1965
Fawn	F	2-80
Flora	F	1961
FLO83	F	6-83
Falstaff	M	5-79
Felicity	F	1964



There were no more births in the family for two years, nor were there any deaths. In January 87, Fay gave birth to her third calf, a male; in April, Flora had a daughter; and in July, Fanny also gave birth to a daughter and this one lived. Sadly, Felicity was not having any success in raising calves.

Flora and her 1987 calf, with daughter Flossy behind

In September 1988 Felicity gave birth to a calf that died the same month. She got pregnant right away and gave birth in November 1990 but this calf also died. We had no idea why she was having such difficulty producing viable calves. In the meantime, Flora, Fanny and Fay each had additional healthy calves. Finally, in March 1993, Felicity gave birth to male who survived. We felt like cheering for her.

Fanny with her second calf born in 1987; this calf grew up to be Farida

Over the next few years life went smoothly for the FBs. There were nine births between 1994 and the end of 1999 and only three deaths and the losses were all of calves. Also during this period Falstaff left the family to strike out on his own. Females stay in the family for the rest of their lives, but males leave anywhere from 9-17 years of age. All was going along as normal but then extremely bad times set in. In 2000 there was another drought which caused tensions between the Maasai and the Park authorities. The result was that the Maasai started spearing elephants again. The FBs happened to be in the area with the protesters and they suffered terribly. Fay was speared and killed as was her calf born in 1998 and Fanny's calf born in 1997. Also in that year Flora became ill and died



and her 1999 calf also died. Thus five members of the family were lost including two adult females.

The FB family was in disarray for at least a year after these deaths. The orphaned offspring of Flora and Fay were confused and didn't know who to follow. Flora and Fay each left three calves. Luckily each of these groups of orphans had one older member to help them. Flora's oldest daughter Flossy was 17 and Fay's oldest daughter Fawn was 20. Both of these females had their own small calves as well, but they acted as leaders for their younger siblings. For a long time the family moved in subgroups, but eventually they coalesced once more under the leadership of Freda with Felicity as her second in charge. It was a relief to see them back together again.

After those tragic losses the FBs actually did very well. Amazingly, there were no deaths from October 2000 to May 2008, and happily for the FBs there were 10 births in the same period. The older females who gave birth were: Felicity, Fanny, Flossy, and Fawn. Some of the younger females grew

up and had their first calves; Farida had her first calf in 2001 and another in 2005; Flame had her first calf in 2002 and another in 2008. The family was flourishing under the leadership of Freda and Felicity. It was a big, social family with many young female calves to help in the care of the infants.



Flossy with her male calf born in 1999; he was later named FritzJCraig

The older female calves in a family are called "allomothers". An allomother is an individual who cares for an infant that is not its own. In other words it is a sort of baby-sitter. Immature female elephants are strongly attracted to young calves particularly newborns. They watch over them, follow them around, rescue them if they get in trouble and just generally fuss over them

and give them lots of attention. This behavior is beneficial for all concerned: the calf is well taken care of, the mother gets a chance to feed and rest, which is just what a lactating female needs, and the baby-sitter learns about mothering herself, which will be very useful knowledge later on when she has her own calf.

There were only two deaths in 2008, but one disturbing one. Fawn disappeared. We don't know how she died. Any death is a loss, but when an adult female dies it affects so many others in the family. Flame's 2008 calf also died of unknown causes. At the end of 2008 the family consisted of the following 19 members:

Individual	Sex	Month-Year of Birth Known or Estimated
Freda	F	1945
Fanny	F	1969
FAN04	M	11-04
Floppy	F	11-00
Fortino	F	8-93
Farida	F	7-87
FAR05	M	5-07
(Fay's)		
(Fawn's)		
Fernandita	F	1-05
File	F	1-00
Feretia	F	12-91
(Flora's)		
Flame	F	3-91
Franck	M	11-02
Flossy	F	6-83
Fabio	M	11-02
FritzJCraig	M	3-99
Felicity	F	1964
FEL07	F	7-07
Figo	M	12-02
Fadila	F	6-98

At the beginning of 2009 Freda may have been as old as 64. Frankly, we were all surprised that she was one of the females to reach this age. As mentioned earlier she seemed to have an ailment but it obviously wasn't serious. One thing that was unusual about Freda is that she stopped having calves when she was in her late 30s. Some females breed right up until they're 60. Freda's last calf was born in June 1985. Fagin, as he was called, had her full attention until he became independent when he was 15.



Freda's last calf, Fagin, in 1989 and all grown up in 2007; note the same veins in his ears—it is one of the most reliable ways to identify elephants

The year 2009 proved to be devastating for all the Amboseli elephants. It was the worst drought in living memory. Even tough old Freda succumbed. It was the end of a long reign for the FB family. Things would never be the same again. In addition to losing Freda the family lost five calves, but unlike many families, no other adult females. Perhaps they didn't fare as badly as some because they had an older, experienced female to take over—Felicity who was 45.

Today, Felicity is doing an excellent job as matriarch. Since the end of the drought no more deaths have occurred and two calves have been born--to Fortino and Farida.

*New matriarch
Felicity*



The family now numbers 20 and consists of the following:

Individual	Sex	Month-Year of Birth Known or Estimated
Felicity	F	1964
Fizz	F	7-07
Figo	M	12-02
Fadila	F	6-98
(Freda's)	F	
Fanny	F	1969
FAN09	F	1-09
Fougamou	M	11-04
Floppy	F	11-00
Fortino	F	8-93
FOR10	F	3-10
Farida	F	7-87
FAR10	F	3-10
Frederic	M	5-07
(Fay's)		
File	F	1-00
Feretia	F	12-91
FRT09	M	1-09
(Flora's)		
Flame	F	3-91
Franck	M	11-02
Flossy	F	6-83
FritzJCraig	M	3-99

The independent males are as follows:

Funzi	Jan-87	441	Fay		
Fraser	Mar-93	543	Felicity		
Fagin	Jun-95	410	Freda		
Fornax	Jan-95	588	Flora		

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February 2011