

## *The History of the GB and GB2 Families*

The GB family managed to confuse me completely the first time I ever saw them in 1975. I had recently set up a permanent camp in the Ol Tukai Orok woodlands in the center of the Park and had begun to observe the elephants on a full-time basis. During the previous three years I had worked part-time in Amboseli, mostly trying to build up a photographic recognition file for the population. By the time I moved to the camp I felt that I knew the families that used the central areas of the Park fairly well.

In the History of the BB family which I posted in the October newsletter and on our website (<http://elephanttrust.org/node/738>) I described how the confusion occurred. The BB family was one of the first families recorded. My colleague Harvey Croze and I first met and photographed the BBs in 1973. At that time the family numbered 12 and included two tusklesses (named Big Tuskless and Bette) and one left one-tusker (Belinda). These characteristics made them very easy to recognize. We referred to them as the "Double Tusklesses".

It was in November, two months after I set up my camp that I realized there was something odd about the "Double Tusklesses". They entered the glade to the north of the camp, took one look at the tents and fled in terror. I managed to count that there were 12 animals in the group including two tusklesses and a one-tusker, but their behavior was so unusual that I became suspicious.

*The big tuskless (left) and the smaller tuskless (right) looking alarmed and running from my vehicle in 1976; eventually they became Gloria and Gladys*



It was in January 1976 that I solved the mystery. I came upon the "Double Tusklesses" again when they ran from my vehicle. This time I was able to go around them and approach cautiously from a different direction. I looked at them carefully with binoculars and yes there were two tuskless females and a one-tusked female but something wasn't right. I looked at the ID photos of the BBs and their one-tusker, Belinda, was a left-one tusker. This was a right one-tusker. And the big tuskless had a hole in her left hear but in quite the right place for Big Tuskless and also she didn't have the ridiculously huge ears of the BBs' Big Tuskless. I had to conclude that these were different individuals.

In the next month I saw these mirror-image Double Tusklesses several more times. They were still frightened of my vehicle but I managed to get some more photos of them. They were definitely an entirely different family, which I eventually called the GBs. I named the two tusklesses Gloria and Gladys and the right one-tusker Grace.

It turned out that the GBs were one of five families that were gradually immigrating into the central part of Amboseli from the east. These families were the GBs, IBs, KBs, LBs and OBs. When I first started seeing them they were extremely wary of vehicles and usually ran away. I think the center of their home range had been the Namalog and Kimana swamps to the east of the Park, but both of these areas were being taken over for cultivation by farmers. Once the Maasai and others began to grow crops there they became intolerant of elephants and chased them away. These five families, who were probably the members of one clan, were then forced to change their range.

I gradually got to know the GBs better as they spent more and more time in the Park. I managed to photograph most of the adults and sub-adults and worked out which calves belonged to which females. Besides the tusklesses and the one-tusker there were a two-tusked adult female, a teenaged female, and numerous confusing young males. There were only four calves, two who were two to three years old and two who were about six to seven years old. In 1976 the family appeared to consist of the following individuals:

Gloria (tuskless female in her 30s)
2-3 year old female calf
Male calf about 7 years old
Geraldine (two-tusked female in her late 20s)
2-3 year old male calf
Grace (one-tusked female in her mid-20s)
6-year-old daughter
Gabriella (two-tusked female around 15)
Gladys (tuskless female around 12)
Young male around 15
Young male around 13
Young male around 12

It soon became evident that the GBs formed a close bond group with the IBs led by the very beautiful Isis, a large female estimated to be 40 years old. These two families were frequently found together in one coordinated group. They always seemed to have a gaggle of young males trailing along with them, and much to my frustration I never could figure out who these males belonged to. They were of the age when young males begin to go independent and some of them were old enough to be independent already and, therefore, I did not know if they were born in the GB and IB families or whether they were just hanging around with them. Over the next couple of years all these young males left and I never was able to decide whether they had been GBs, IBs, or just visitors.

When I look back now at the age structure of the GB family in 1976 I can see that, like most of the Amboseli families, they had produced very few calves in the '70s. At the time it didn't seem particularly odd to me, it was only several years later that I realized that breeding was being suppressed by environmental conditions at the time.

The 1970s up until 1977 was both a period of low rainfall, culminating in a serious drought in 1976, and a time of relatively heavy poaching. Both these factors contributed to the low recruitment rate. In addition, the GBs and the other immigrant families probably experienced more Maasai spearing incidents than most of the central families. I don't know how many other adults and calves the family may have started with at the beginning the 70s; I only got to know them at the height of the '76 drought. They didn't lose any more members from the time I first photographed them till the drought ended.

Good rains fell in December 1976 and in the following three years there was higher than average rainfall with resulting abundant and nutritious vegetation. At the same time, for reasons I've never been sure about, the poaching stopped; and in 1978 the Maasai warriors were promoted to junior elders who no longer felt it necessary to spear elephants to prove their bravery. All these changes meant a period of peace and plenty for the elephants.



*GB calves mudwallowing in the good times: for calves the rule is always to get as muddy as possible*

The good times also probably made it easier for the GBs and the other eastern families to move into Amboseli. I don't know if they met with any antagonism from the clans already in the Park, but if they did, they must have

persisted, because they became residents and today they spend as much time in the park as any of the original groups and are completely relaxed and tolerant around my vehicle as well as the tourist buses.

The period of abundance and peace was marred for the GBs by one loss. The young female Gabriella became ill in 1978 with what I think may have been a blocked intestine. In the early days of her illness she repeatedly stretched out her front legs and rocked back and forth. She appeared to be in pain. She was feeding a bit and staying with the family, but I did not see her defecate. The next time I saw her she had stopped feeding and looked thin. Gradually over the next weeks she grew gaunt and was no longer even stretching. She eventually left the family and the last time I saw her she was standing under a tree barely able to stand with just skin draped over bones. (Today we would have tried to bring in a vet, but that wasn't possible in those days.) A few days later I found her carcass. Another family, the EBs led by Echo, came upon the body just as I did, and after cautiously approaching and smelling it, they proceeded to try to bury it with earth and branches which they went off to collect and bring back to the carcass. It was an eerie and touching sight.

This loss, however, was soon followed by gains. 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 them 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 to the Amboseli population between January 1977 and November 1978. From November 25, 1978 to June 5, 1980, one hundred calves were born. At times it seemed like they were falling out of the sky. The GBs made quite a respectable contribution to the baby boom. In 1979 Grace and Gladys had calves; and in early 1980 Gloria and Geraldine gave birth.

*The beautiful right one-tusker, Grace*



The only GB female who did not produce a calf during the baby boom was Glenda, who was always a bit of a mystery and possibly a renegade as well. When I was first getting to know the family I didn't record her. The first time I noted her was March 30, 1976. She was on her own being pursued by several males including one in musth and I assumed



she was in oestrus. (If she was, she was one of the very few females who came into oestrus that year. There was no sign that she gave birth 22 months later.) After being chased by several bulls she joined an odd little group of calves with no other adults. I saw Glenda one more time in September of that year, and then on January 27, 1977, I found her with the GBs. From that time on I began to see her on a fairly regular basis with the family, but if anyone tended to split off in the GBs it was Glenda. I wondered what her history was. She may have come from a family that had lost most of its members, but formed a bond group with the GBs. In any case, I don't know why Glenda didn't have a calf during the baby boom. She was certainly old enough; I estimated her to be in early 20s. It could be that she had trouble conceiving or carrying a fetus or had given birth but lost the calf before I recorded it.

As I mentioned earlier I never managed to sort out the young males in the GB family. I photographed them and gave them numbers, but I was never sure if they were GBs or IBs or recently independent males from other families. Most of these young males became fully independent in the years between 1977 and 1980. The only male who stayed on a bit longer was Gomer, Geraldine's son who was born in 1974. He, however, turned out to be very precocious and left the family at nine years old in 1983. The average age of independence is 14. Gomer probably left to join his older male relatives. There were no other males of his age in his family to spar with and test his strength against.

*Gomer several years after he left the GBs: he has always been easy to recognize because he has a crumpled left ear; we don't know how he got it*



Conditions continued to be good during the early 1980s with the result that there was a second baby boom in 1983. The females who had given birth in 1979 and 1980 were ready to give birth again three or four years later. In the GB family Gladys and Geraldine had sons, and Grace had a daughter. Glenda still didn't have a calf. By the end of 1983 the GB family numbered 15 and consisted of the following individuals:

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Known or Estimated Year &amp; Month of Birth</b>
Gloria	F	1944
Golda	F	4-74
Goodness	F	1-80
Geraldine	F	1948
GER83	M	5-83
Gardenia	F	2-80
Gomer	M	1-74
Grace	F	1950
Gail	F	6-83
Gwen	F	6-79
Gillie	F	1970
Glenda	F	1957
Gladys	F	1963
GLA83	M	4-83
Georgia	F	5-79

In Africa droughts are inevitable and 1984 proved to be a year of very low rainfall. Amboseli experienced hard times once again. Perhaps this drought was not quite on the scale of the 1976 one, but it was devastating nonetheless. Many of the calves that had been born in 1983 died, and because the Maasai and their cattle were competing for the very limited resources, there were many spearing incidents and more elephants died as a result. During this dreadful year Glenda finally gave birth. In June she was recorded with a newborn male calf. He was born at the beginning of a long, severe dry season. However, he proved to be a tough, little calf and, unlike many of the other '84 calves, he made it through.

During the following years Amboseli experienced average to higher than average rainfall and the GBs thrived. Becoming a central Amboseli family was apparently a good strategy. In the 1984 drought the GBs lost no calves or adults. They went from strength to strength, with the female calves born during the baby boom years, producing calves of their own. There were a few losses of calves and departures of young males, but only one adult loss. In April 1987, Gillie, the daughter of Grace, died of unknown causes, leaving her three-year-old son, Gabe an orphan. Usually a calf of this age dies after its mother dies, but Gabe somehow made it, possibly because he had his grandmother, Grace to look after him.

Life went along well for the GBs over the next 10 years with no significant changes except continuous growth. During that time 21 calves were born and only four members died, which is an amazing record. Among those four Gladys had some bad luck. First her calf born in 1996 died when he was only seven months old, then the next year her 14-year-old son, Gavin, died of unknown causes. The third death was a mystery. Gardenia, the eight-year-old daughter of Geraldine disappeared. The fourth death was very sad. Grace gave birth to a very premature calf. Martyn Colbeck and I were filming the second Echo film at the time and happened upon Grace and her older calves surrounding the tiny, pale calf. We thought the calf, a female, was dead but then Grace gently touched her with her foot the calf moved. It was heartbreaking to watch Grace try to get the weak calf to its feet. Eventually, she did the most remarkable thing I've ever seen an elephant do. She picked the calf up and held it on top of her tusk with her trunk and carried her across the plain until she reached the palms where there was shade. She and the others stayed hidden in the palms for the rest of the day. In the morning the calf was dead but Grace and the others kept coming back to the place during that day and the next.



*Grace on the left with all her daughters and their calves: Galana is leading*

In 1998 Glenda died. By that time she had three surviving calves, so she didn't do too badly in the end. The major change and tragedy for the family happened in 2000 when their matriarch Gloria, the bigger of the two tusklesses, died. She appeared to have died of natural causes due to old age. When we looked at her teeth we realized that she was older than we had thought, at least in her late 50s. Her final set of teeth was worn down to a small area.

The death of a matriarch always causes major disruption in a family. Gloria had been their leader for at least 26 years and probably longer. She was an excellent matriarch. When conditions proved unfavorable in their normal range she brought them into Amboseli and



somehow made sure they were accepted in the central part of the elephant range. Her family grew and prospered. We weren't sure what would happen to the family. A two-tusked female named Geraldine was the next oldest at 52 and she took over as matriarch. However, some interesting dynamics occurred. Apparently Geraldine and Grace, who was the next oldest after her, did not form a close bond and in fact, they did not seem to get along. As a result Grace left the family with her offspring and created her own family, which we eventually called the GB2s.

I have to admit that Grace was one of my elephant heroines. First of all she was amazingly beautiful with her long, graceful right tusk. Second she endeared me to her when she tried to save her premature calf in such a remarkable way. Third she was such a successful mother and matriarch. When I first met her she only had one calf. By giving birth to daughter after daughter she built a very successful, self-contained family. Although she lost her first daughter, Gillie, she gave birth to five more females: Gwen, Gail, Garissa, Galana and G-Mail. The four oldest grew up to have calves of their own so that by the time Grace left to found her own family she had already had a big family. The GB2s were favorites of all the researchers. There was something so majestic and yet gentle about Grace. Everyone loved her.

By 2008, Grace led a family of 16. Then tragedy struck. Grace disappeared but her calves were with the family. After a few more sightings of the family without her we knew she was dead. It was a sad time for all of us. Her oldest daughter Gwen took over, but then in the following year Amboseli experienced the worst drought in living memory. There was at



the same time an upsurge of poaching. Gwen disappeared. We think she was poached. Her younger sister Gail had to become the leader. Gail is only 24. That's young for a matriarch.

*Golda with Gladys in 2006; Golda faced new challenges three years later*

In the meantime the GBs were also experiencing losses. Geraldine died in 2007 and Gladys died in 2009.

These deaths left Golda to be the leader. At 37 years old, Golda is older and far more experienced than Gail. What is fascinating is that Gail appears to be aware of that wisdom



that Golda has and she has brought her family to re-join the GBs from time to time. We wonder if they will join up and form one family once again.

The families have definitely suffered as a result of the drought and poaching but they are also showing signs of great resilience. The GBs number 18, which is still a big family; the GB2s number 14. The composition and structure of the two families follows:

<b>Individual</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Known or Estimated Year &amp; Month of Birth</b>
<b>GB</b>		
(Gloria)	F	(1944-2000)
Golda	F	4-74
Gabarone	M	04
Goodness	F	1-80
Google	M	6-01
Geeta	F	7-90
Gretchen	F	2-03
(Geraldine)	F	(1948-2007)
GarbaTulla	F	5-87
Gateway	M	2-00
Gameboy	M	5-00
Gerard	M	2-05
(Gladys)	F	(1963-2009)
Georgia	F	5-79
Gennaro	M	1-02
Graca	F	2-97
Garamba	F	3-92
Genevive	F	3-05
Gigabyte	F	2-00
Garango	M	11-04
(Gigi)	F	(1988-2009)
Gorp	M	10-01

<b>GB2</b>		
(Grace)	F	(1950-2008)
Gail	F	6-83
Garbo	F	11-03
Gertrude	F	5-99
Garissa	F	2-87
Giza	F	11-04
Galileo	F	4-00
Galana	F	11-92
GNA10	F	7-10
(Gwen)	F	(1979-2009)
Gambia	F	3-92
Gilberto	M	12-02
Gemma	F	3-97
Gabby	F	1-01
Gustave	M	5-05
G-Mail	F	4-01

In addition the GBs have produced and raised many males who are now out in the world of the independent bulls. Two—Ganesh and Gomer—are already coming into musth and fathering calves of their own. Even Grace, who had only daughters for such a long time, finally gave birth to one son who is now independent.

<b>GB &amp; GB2 Independent Males</b>	<b>Birth</b>	<b>Male No.</b>	<b>Mother</b>
Ganesh	Jan-63	169	?
Gomer	Jan-74	218	Geraldine
Garth	Apr-83	378	Geraldine
Geoffrey	Jun-84	395	Glenda
Gabe	Dec-84	396	Gillie
Gordon	Jan-85	411	Gloria
Gilgil	Dec-87	442	Golda
Glabre	Mar-91	510	Geraldine
Grandis	Jun-91	511	Glenda
Grewia	Dec-91	512	Gladys

Grumeti	Mar-92	532	Golda
Giff	Feb-96	614	Geraldine
Griffen	4-97	633	Grace

I wish both these families well. They have given us many hours of pleasure and have revealed so much to us about elephant life. We miss the matriarchs and older females but we're all getting to know the young adult females who have taken on the responsibilities of their families. They are quickly endearing themselves to us for their bravery and flexibility in taking on such a task.

*Cynthia Moss*  
*Amboseli*  
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