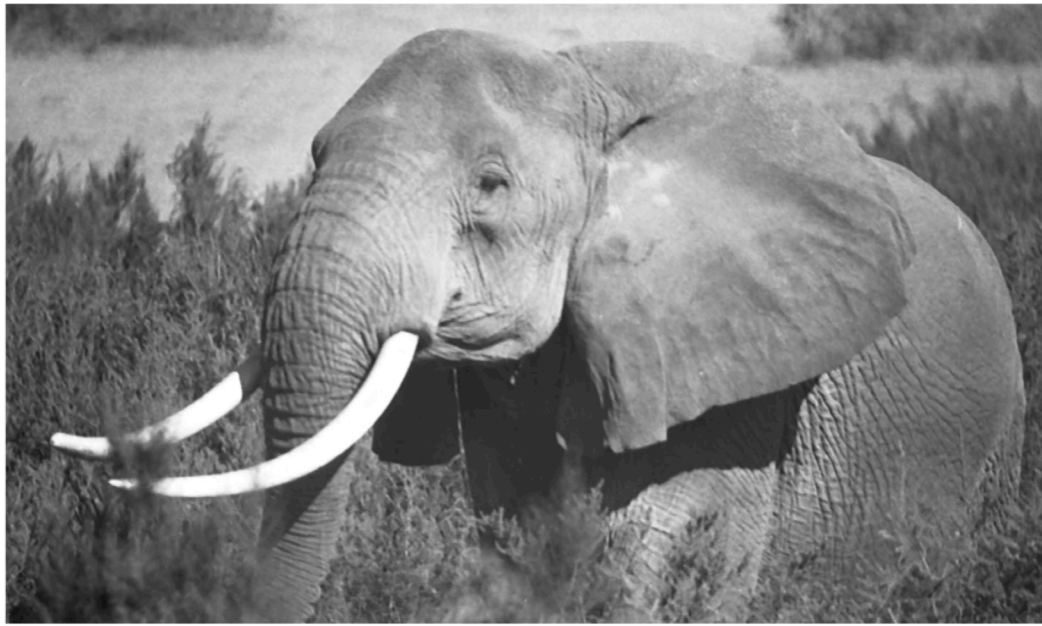


## The History of the IA/IC Family

The combined IA/IC family has an unusual history. In Amboseli family composition is generally fairly straightforward. All the adult females are related: they are mother and daughter; grandmother and granddaughter; aunt and niece; or sisters or cousins. There are a few interesting exceptions and this family may be one of those.

The IA family was one of the first we found and photographed in September 1972. At that time it consisted of six members. The matriarch was a beautiful big female whom Harvey called Isabel



Isabel on September 2, 1972: she was one of the most beautiful elephants we've ever seen in Amboseli

after his mother. We estimated her to be over 50 years old. There was also a young adult female about 17 years old and a younger, ten-year-old female. The older one was named Irene, the younger one Iris. In addition there were three youngsters, all males. One was about 14 years old and he was called Igor; the second was about seven years old; and the third was a small calf about a year old belonging to Irene.

Isabel	1920	Adult F
Irene	1955	Adult F
IRE71	1971	M
Iris	1962	Adolescent F
Igor	1958	Young M
Calf	1965	M



Igor in September 1972 when he was 14 years old;  
compare this photo to the one at the end of this story.

Over the next five years we saw the family regularly. Once I was living in Amboseli, starting in September 1975, I got to know the IAs well. They were western elephants, just as the HAs were. That meant they stayed on the western side of the Engongu Narok Swamp moving out towards the Il Merisheri Hills in the evening and coming in to drink and feed in the swamp in the daytime.

There were no big changes in the family during those years until Iris gave birth to her first known calf in May of 1975. Sadly this calf died in November of that year. The following year there was a terrible drought in Amboseli but there were no losses among the IAs. Then in April 1977 a terrible tragedy occurred. Isabel, Irene and the two male calves disappeared. We suspect they were killed, because there was serious poaching around the Park at that time. Fortunately, from 1978 on the Maasai refused to cooperate with the poachers and there were peaceful times ahead for the Amboseli elephants. However, that was no help to the IAs.

Iris who was only 15 years old had to take over as matriarch. She didn't have much of a family to lead. It was just her and Igor and by this time Igor was 19 years. He had been what we call a "Mama's Boy" staying with Isabel right up until she died. Most young males leave their birth family at the age of 12-14. A few have left as young as 9-10; the oldest Mama's Boy were 18-19 by the time they left. These late teenagers look somewhat ridiculous standing next to their mothers. Bulls grow rapidly in their teen years with the result that the average bull is bigger than the largest females by the time he is 17. In his last year with the family Igor was taller than his mother but still following her around as if he was a two year old. It was actually endearing to watch him with her.

Igor finally became independent after Isabel was killed, leaving Iris by herself. As a lone female she became what we called a "floater". She moved on her own or most often tried to join another family. Some families were tolerant of floaters others aggressively chased them away. It must have been a very difficult time for Iris.

Sometime between 1977 and 1980 Iris was joined by a younger female born around 1965. We referred to her as Three Holes Right because she had three holes in her right ear. We



don't know where she came from or which family she had belonged to. I wondered whether the IA calf we first recorded as being born in 1965 and thought had died in 1977 along with the others might have been incorrectly sexed. We had noted it was a male, but perhaps it was a female. We have made mistakes on the sex of calves before and continue to do so from time to time. We then have to note in our field notes that we have discovered a "sex change".

Iris's ID photo

I suspected though that Three Holes Right was a floater like Iris because they weren't always together. It seemed to be a very loose connection. Many years later when Beth Archie was doing her DNA studies she did an analysis for both Iris and Three Holes and it showed that they were not at all closely related, so my designation of her as a floater was correct and there had been no sex change after all.

In any case Three Holes and Iris started spending some of their time together in the late 70s. In 1980 Iris gave birth to a female calf. We were happy it was a female because it meant that she



might be able to build up a family. Any male calves she had would eventually leave but females would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Three years later Three Holes Right had her first calf, also a female. At this point Iris and

ID Photo for Three Holes Right



Three Holes still weren't together consistently enough to call them one family so we gave Three Holes and her calf the designation IC (there was already an unrelated IB family). At this point we probably should have given Three Holes a proper name beginning with "I" but we were so used to the name it stuck. We did, however, start giving her offspring "I" names.

Over the next years Iris worked hard at producing calves to build up her family. She had two more female calves, one in 1985 and another in 1989. Her first calf and the two new ones were eventually named Ilsa (on left), Imogen and Ine (below).



Three Holes was not as successful. Her next calf was born six years after her first (she might very well have lost one that we never recorded because the usual interval between calves is four years) in April 1989. Unfortunately, this calf died in 1991 of unknown causes, but in December of that year she had a successful birth of another female. Her two female calves were named Ismay and Ipomoea.

Ipomoea was named with our relatively new system of naming. By 1987 I was finding it harder and harder to come up with new names for calves. I had gone through five Names for Babies books and one Dictionary of Saints. Finally we decided to name each year's calves



with a theme. Usually a calf is not named until it is four years old. Up until that age it is referred to by a code based on its mother's name and its year of birth. In 1991 when the 1987 calves were four years old we chose the first theme, which was Kenya place names.

There were no "I" calves born in 1987 but there was one born in 1989 and that theme was Norwegian names provided by a Norwegian friend who was working in Amboseli. Iris's 1989 was named Ine. For 1991 the theme was plants that grow in the Amboseli area. *Ipomoea* is a common one.

By the end of 1991 we could say that the IA and IC families very much existed as families. Against all the odds they had succeeded.

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Month & Year of Birth
<b>IA</b>		
Iris	F	1962
Ine	F	4-89
Imogen	F	1-85
Ilsa	F	4-80
<b>IC</b>		
Three Holes Right	F	1965
Ismay	F	3-83
Ipomoea	F	12-91

In the meantime Igor was out with the big boys. He was given the male number 105. (All the males have numbers as well as names to make it easier to record them on data sheets; the females have letter codes based on their names.) In 1991 Igor was 33 years old and already a magnificent bull. He had started coming into musth—the period of heightened aggression when a male seeks out females in estrus or heat and fights off male challengers—in 1988 when he was 30.

In June 1994 the first male calf was born to the IA family in many years. Iris had a son in June 1994 but he only lived for five months. Two years later Ismay, the first daughter of Three Holes gave birth to a male, but he died eight months later. It was a big event to have one of the second-generation females give birth. It would have been a sign of the reconstitution of the family so it was particularly unfortunate that this calf died.

Two more years went by and then in 1998 and 1999 there were three successful births of males. Three Holes had a son in April

1998; Iris gave birth to a male in April 1999; and finally Ismay gave birth again in May 1999 and this time her calf survived. This was the first surviving grandchild to be born to the two families.

We didn't know what was happening with Iris's 19-year-old daughter Ilsa. She was three years older than Ismay but so far had not given birth or we had missed the births of calves that only lived a day or two. Finally in January 2000 we recorded a birth for Ilsa but this calf, a female, died within a month. It is always very sad to see a female of this age with no surviving calves.

Iris's second oldest female also wasn't having much luck. She gave birth to a male calf in July 2001, when she was 16, but he died in October of the same year. It is not unusual for first calves to die, but I was rooting for this family to grow and so it was upsetting to see them lose calves.

By the end of 2003 the IAs and ICs were spending almost all of their time together acting as a single unit. We decided that the two families had fused and began calling the merged family the IA/ICs. Iris as the oldest was the matriarch.

In August 2002 Ilsa finally gave birth to a calf that survived. It was a male. The next year Ismay had her second surviving calf, another male. Unfortunately, these successes were followed by two losses: Three Holes had a calf in February 2003, but he died in October of that year. Ipomoea had her first calf in May 2004, but she didn't even live for one month. However, two more calves were born in 2004 and these survived: both born in February, Imogen had a female and Iris had a male.

By the end of 2004 the merged family was looking very good. It had grown to 14 members. I was pleased with how well Iris had done as such a young matriarch.

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Month & Year of Birth
<b>IA/IC</b>		
Iris	F	1962
Ibadan	M	2-04
Iagan	M	4-99
Ine	F	4-89
Imogen	F	1-85
Ilesha	F	2-04
Ilsa	F	4-80
Ibrahima	M	8-02

Three Holes Right	F	1965
Iariq	M	4-99
Ismay	F	3-83
Imre	M	5-99
Irons	M	11-03
Ipomoea	F	12-91

Sadly they had some hard times ahead. Things first appeared to be looking good. In 2005 Three Holes had a female calf; in 2006 Ipomoea also had a daughter; and in 2008 Ismay gave birth to a male. As it turned out none of these calves would see their fourth birthday. Three Holes' calf died of natural causes in 2007. She had always seemed sickly and weak and then one day she lay down and never got up again. She was not quite dead when we found her; her family had left which was unusual but she had been lagging for such a long time that they may have given up on her. I stayed parked next to her for several hours because I wanted her to die in peace without being torn apart by hyenas. She died that evening.

Three more calves were born at the beginning of 2009 to Iris, Imogen and Ilsa. Their fate was sealed when Amboseli underwent the worst drought in living memory that year. Nearly 400 elephants died during 2009 including 250 calves. The three new calves in the IA/IC family died plus the 2006 and the 2008 calves making five deaths among the juveniles.

A much greater and more profound loss was the death of Iris. We don't know if she died from the drought or was poached. The illegal ivory trade had started up again after a long respite. We never found Iris's carcass so we don't know how she died.

We also lost the magnificent Igor in 2009. We know that he had a wound; vets had treated him. He may have succumbed to that wound or he may have been killed by another attack. He was a prime target for poachers with his huge tusks. The Mama's Boy had grown up to be an amazing big bull, beloved by all of us and any photographer who happened upon him. The well-known photographer Nick Brandt uses his photo of Igor as the logo for his organization Big Life Foundation (see [www.biglifeafrica.org](http://www.biglifeafrica.org)). Nick was inspired to set up his foundation because of the loss of Igor and some of the other wonderful Amboseli bulls.





**Igor in 2005 at 47 years old; he lived another four years**

In the meantime, Three Holes surprised us by giving birth to a female calf in November 2009 when the drought was at its height. Fortunately, for her the rains came outside the Park in December and finally inside and all around in January. Still it is amazing that

Three Holes was able to keep her pregnancy going all through those very bad times. That calf has survived.



Two of the "boys" in the IA/IC family play now that times are good once more

A month or so after the rains came the family was starting to recover. They put on weight and began to have energy again. Also for all the Amboseli females reproductive activity started once again. There had been almost no matings during all of 2009, which means that 22 months later in 2011 there are almost no births. During the first six months of this year there was one stillbirth and one successful birth. We don't expect many more until December. From that point on there will be deluge of calves. All the adult females appear to be pregnant. There are 453 females who will be 12 years and older in 2012. Conceivably all but the two who have given birth this year could have calves. It will be amazing and so much fun to see all those calves.

In the IA/IC family there are six adult females. I expect all of them to have calves in this coming year. It will revitalize the family after their losses. I'm looking forward to that time.

*Cynthia Moss  
Amboseli  
June 2011*