

The History of the ZA Family

Not surprisingly the ZA family was one of the last families to be identified. At the beginning of the study I had decided to assign each family a letter of the alphabet and then give each member of that family a name starting with that letter. I got to 'Z' in 1976. The Z family eventually became the ZAs when more than 26 families were discovered and we had to start going through the alphabet a second time.

The ZAs were first seen on January 27, 1976. They were in an aggregation of about 80 elephants but I managed to get photos of two individuals. One of these was a big female I called "Low Ears" because her ears hung low and flat. Another was tuskless. I saw them again the following month and then not again until January 1977. On that occasion I recorded a first-year calf with a younger female, a male estimated to have been born in March 1976.

Finally in June 1977 I was able to get more photos and begin to figure out who made up the family. It wasn't easy because even on this day they were in a group of 200. However, they formed a subgroup of 11 and I felt fairly confident that except for a female and calf from another family that I knew already, the rest were a family and I began to name the individuals. "Low Ears" and the tuskless female were not with them on this day and were never seen again. The nine I felt relatively confident about consisted of the following:

Zara	Adult female
Her '76 calf	Male
7-8-year-old calf	Male
Zoe	Young adult female
Zenobia	Young adult female
Zilla	Young adult female
Zita	Immature female
Immature	Female
Immature	Female

I got to know the ZA family better over the next years but they did not use the central part of the Park and thus were not seen frequently. It was very confusing figuring out who was in the ZAs and who some of the other odd females were seen associating with them.

During 1976 there had been a very bad drought in Amboseli and most of the rest of the country as well. Many of the calves died but somehow Zara kept her calf alive. Other calves may have been born to the young adult females in the family but if so they died before I recorded them.



Zoe and Zara greeting family members in an old photo from the early 1980s

When good rains came at the end of 1976 it still took the females quite some time to recover. The elephant families using the central part of Amboseli appeared to get back into condition earlier and after a 22-month gestation period they started giving birth in late 1978 and through 1979 in what was to prove to be a baby boom. The peripheral

elephants including the ZAs took longer to join the others. Zara and Zoe had

calves in 1980 and one of the younger adult females, now called Zea, also gave birth. Zara had a female; the other two had males.

In June 1981, a female I started recording with the ZAs in 1978 gave birth to a female calf. This mother was called Zerlinda. With her had come another young female whom I called ZsaZsa. By now the other two young females who were there from the beginning were named Zea and Zaneta. I also named Zara's older male calves. By 1981 I felt fairly confident that the family consisted of the following:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth
Zara	F	1953
ZAR80	F	Nov-80
Zeppo	M	Mar-76
Zeke	M	1970
Zoe	F	1954
ZOE80	M	Apr-80
Zenobia	F	1953
Zaneta	F	1964
Zerlinda	F	1964
ZER81	F	Jun-81
Zilla	F	1967
Zea	F	1968
ZEA80	M	Dec-80
Zita	F	1969
ZsaZsa	F	1971

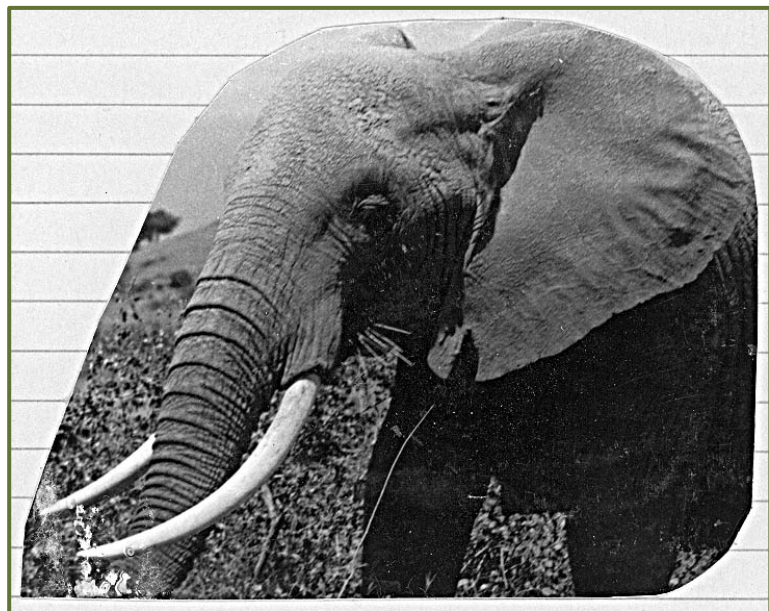
I suspected that the ZAs had been a very big family at one time because there were so many members around the same age who couldn't be sisters, which meant that there had to have been many older females who gave birth to these individuals. The 1970s were a time of fairly heavy poaching around Amboseli and I think the ZAs experienced serious losses.

Fortunately for them, over the next few years life was safe and prosperous for them. They did well right up until 1984 with only two losses. Zenobia died from what appeared to be a natural illness and Zerlinda's calf died when she was a year old, also of illness. On the other hand they had two additions: Zaneta and Zilla gave birth to their first calves, both males.

The good times were not to last. Another drought hit Amboseli in 1984. Not only did calves die because their mothers could not produce enough milk for them, but there was a lot of conflict between the Maasai livestock and the elephants for the very limited vegetation remaining. Many elephants were speared that year including Zoe. Sadly, Zara's 1980 calf did not make it through the drought.

Zara gave birth again at the end of 1984. The rest of the 1980s saw the birth of seven more calves, but there were also five deaths including two major losses. Zara and Zaneta were killed possibly speared or possibly poached. Both Zara and Zaneta's young calves died because they couldn't survive without their mothers' milk. Zara's older calf Zeppo also died probably killed at the same time she was.

The loss of a matriarch is profound. Their leader and much of their knowledge were suddenly gone. In the case of the ZAs there was not a clear successor. All the remaining females were in their early 20s, really too young to take over as matriarch. Zerlinda was the oldest at 22 but she never seemed to be well integrated in the family. It was a difficult time for them but eventually Zilla at only 19 years old seemed to be the leader for most of the family.



Zerlinda's ID photo



Zilla's ID photo; one of the prettiest Amboseli females

The ZAs were not having an easy time. Zea and ZsaZsa both disappeared presumably killed for one reason or another. A reflection of how difficult it is for families without an experienced matriarch is how well calves do. Ten calves were born to the ZAs during the 1990s. Four of these calves died before they reached three. However, the fact that six of them survived means that Zerlinda and Zilla were doing something right.

On another positive note, their male calves were growing up and reaching independence. Zeke, Zubin, Zeo, Zelig and Zane had left the family and several more were soon to follow.

By the end of 2000 the ZA family consisted of 19 members and five known independent males as follows:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	Mother if Dead
Zerlinda	F	1964	
ZER00	M	Jan-00	
Zanawi	F	3-97	
Zephira	F	Nov-93	
Zahir	M	Dec-86	
Zilla	F	1967	
Zuberel	M	Mar-95	
Zizigium	M	Feb-91	
Zeno	M	Jan-86	
Zelig	M	Oct-82	
Zea	F	1968	
ZEA87	F	Apr-87	
Zita	F	1969	
Zambezi	M	Apr-92	
Zolly	M	Dec-86	
Zombe	F	Apr-87	
ZOM00	M	Nov-00	
Zulieka	F	Jan-86	ZsaZsa
Zingibera	M	Dec-91	ZsaZsa

Independent Males	Code No	Birth Date	Mother
Zeke	240	1970	Zara
Zubin	351	Apr-80	Zoe
Zeo	352	Dec-80	Zea
Zane	364	Feb-82	Zaneta
Zelig	365	Oct-82	Zilla

All was going well for the ZAs over the next eight years as it was for all of the Amboseli families. It was a period of relative peace and plenty. Nine calves were born to the ZAs while there were only three deaths. Two of these were of independent males Zeno and Zeke. We don't know what happened to Zeke but we do know that Zeno was speared. Conflict between wildlife and the Maasai continued at a low level. A few elephants were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Zeno was one of those. The third death was that of the adult female Zita. We never found her carcass and so do not know the circumstances of her death.

At the end of 2008 the fortunes of the elephants and all the wildlife, livestock and people changed drastically. Amboseli was in the grip of the worst drought in living memory. Thousands of cattle, sheep, goats, zebras, wildebeest and other animals died. The elephants were not spared; over 400 of the 1550 elephants known to the project died. Elephant families split into small foraging groups. All were exhausted, trying to make it from one day to the next.



Zea's son Zeo grew up to be fine male who is now entering his prime at 34 years old

To add to the crisis there was an upsurge of poaching spurred by a demand for ivory in China. The calves that died during 2009 succumbed to drought, but many of the adults were killed for their tusks. The ZAs were not spared although they did remarkably well compared to other families. They lost three

members but one was their matriarch Zerlinda. She and her daughter Zephira disappeared along with Zerlinda's youngest calf in June 2009. It must have been extra tough for the ZAs to lose their matriarch at such a difficult time. However, Zilla who was already active in leading the family took over and saw the family through the rest of the drought.

Most remarkable was that the ZA females gave birth to two calves during the drought and both of them survived. Zerlinda's daughter Zanawi gave birth to her first calf in January of that terrible year. ZsaZsa's daughter Zulieka gave birth in June.



Zombe and her calves after the rescue from the well and before she became ill

The drought broke in early 2010 and with abundant rainfall vegetation grew and life was good for the elephants once again. The ZAs joined the baby boom that occurred once the females recovered from the drought. Three calves were born in 2012, a male to Zombe, and females to Zambrotta and Zilla. Zombe and her calf became famous when the calf was rescued from a well by the ATE team.



Zulieka and her calf born during the drought in 2009; he is called ZouBa and he has a new brother born in January 2014

The rescue and reuniting of mother and calf was filmed and went viral on YouTube. It was also shown on TV and in the end was seen by millions of viewers. To see this video go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JOHw7lX3Gu4>.

I wish I could report that that

was the happy ending for Zombe and her calf, but

tragically Zombe became ill in January 2014 and died. The Kenya Wildlife Service made the decision to send her famous calf to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust orphanage in Nairobi. We named him Ziwa just before he was sent off and he had a hard time of it at the beginning but he has now adjusted well.

Fortunately, the other members of the ZA family are doing very well. There have been no other deaths in the family since the drought other than Zombe. Two more calves were born to the family in 2014. Zulieka had a son in January and Zanawi also had a male in April. The family is growing once again. In addition the ZAs have been one of the most successful in producing independent males. To date there are 12 living ZA males out in the world of the Amboseli bulls.

Compared to many areas in Africa these days Amboseli remains relatively safe for elephants. We are doing everything we can to keep it that way. We want the ZAs and all the other elephants to live out their rich, complex lives in peace.

*Cynthia Moss
Amboseli National Park
April 2014*

Current Composition and Structure of the ZA Family

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	Mother if Dead {Grandmother}
Zilla	F	1967	
ZIL12	F	Jun-12	
Zawinul	M	Jun-08	
Zander	M	May-05	
Zambrotta	F	Dec-02	
ZBT12	F	Apr-12	
Zulieka	F	Jan-86	ZsaZsa
ZUL14	M	Jan-14	
ZouBa	M	Jun-09	
Zuckerman	M	Jan-03	
Zinedine	F	Jul-02	Zita
Zizinia	F	Jul-06	Zombe
Zanawi	F	Mar-97	Zerlinda
ZNW14	M	Apr-14	
Zwanet	F	Jan-09	
Zagazig	F	Nov-04	Zerlinda
Zulu	F	Mar-07	Zephira {Zerlinda}
Independent Males	Code No	Birth Date	Mother
Zubin	351	Apr-80	Zoe
Zeo	352	Dec-80	Zea
Zane	364	Feb-82	Zaneta
Zelig	365	Oct-82	Zilla
Zolly	429	Dec-86	Zita
Zahir	430	Dec-86	Zerlinda
Zizigium	525	Feb-91	Zilla
Zingibera	526	Dec-91	ZsaZsa
Zambezi	541	Apr-92	Zita
Zuberel	607	Mar-95	Zilla
ZipDrive	742	Oct-00	Zombe
Zero	745	Jan-00	Zerlinda