

THE HISTORY OF THE OA FAMILY

I first met the OA family on October 20, 1973 early on in the study when I was working only part-time. They were in a large aggregation of about 100 elephants and about all I could do was photograph as many adult females as possible.

On April 10, 1974, I found a small family of seven females and calves plus one adult male. I recognized two of the females from the photographs I had taken the year before. This time I was able to get more photographs and begin to sort out who was in the family. There was an exceptionally beautiful matriarch and two younger females. The family appeared to consist of the following seven members:



Olga with her family on the first day they were recorded in October 1973; she was and remains one of the most beautiful elephants we've ever known in Amboseli

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Beautiful Matriarch | adult female >35 years old |
| Calf | about one year old |
| Younger adult female | 18-20 years old |
| Tuskless female calf | 3-4 years old |
| Young female with up-curved tusks | 12-13 years old |
| Immature female | 9-10 years old |
| Immature female | 5-6 years old |

I designated this family the OAs and named the matriarch Olga and the second adult female Orlanda. However, I did not see them again for over a year. I finally set up a camp and began working nearly full time in the Park in September 1975. One of the groups I found that first month was the OAs. I saw Orlanda in a big group of seventy elephants, but I did not see Olga or any of the others. With Orlanda was a tiny male calf about three months old.

On October 20, I found Orlanda with her new calf and her tuskless female calf, whom I decided to name Olive because without any tusks, she looked like the cartoon character Olive Oyl. The following month I found Orlanda with her two calves and the young female with the very up-curved tusks,

whom I named Odette. By now I was wondering what had happened to Olga and the others. It seemed strange that they were not together because I was sure that they were the members of the same family.

Orlanda, here in 1975, was a classic Amboseli female with smooth ears and graceful tusks



I saw the family six times during 1976 but only Orlanda, her small calf, plus Olive and Odette were present. Sadly, I had to conclude that Olga and her young calf had died. There was considerable poaching around the Park in the first half of the '70s and

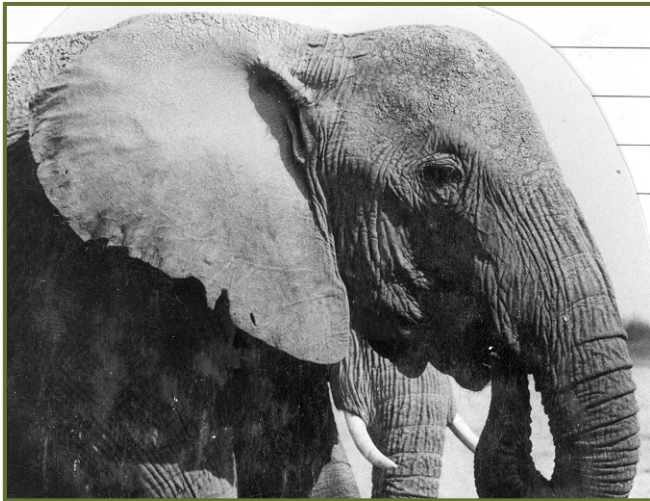
many elephants were lost when they traveled out of the Park on wet season migrations. The poachers sought the bulls with their heavier tusks, but they would also take the bigger females.

It was not until 1977 that I got to know the OAs well. On January 25, I found Orlanda in a group of eight, including two adult bulls. The six females and calves consisted of Orlanda, her '75 calf, Olive, Odette, and two younger females, probably the same ones I had seen back in 1974. Olga and her calf were not there. I was able to get good photographs of the younger animals and conclude that the family had coalesced again and had six members. Orlanda, who I estimated was born in 1955, became the matriarch when Olga died, which was probably at the end of 1974. Thus, Orlanda had to take over the roll of leader when she was only 19 years old, which was very young. However, she appeared to be capable and had managed to keep her little family together.

It was also in 1977 that I realized that the OAs formed a bond group with another family, the CBs. This family was led by a young female, or possibly two young females, Chloe and Celeste. Their matriarch died in 1976, again probably poached. 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 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 and was sad when she disappeared.

I don't know if the CBs and OAs always formed a bond group or only after the death of their matriarchs, but they started to spend more and more



Olive was always a favorite of the research team because without tusks and her distinctive ears she was easy to recognize

time together. Perhaps it was for reassurance. Anyway it made things more confusing for me. It was difficult to figure out who was who among the adolescents when the two families were together. The young females in the OA group were about the same age as the CB teenagers and they all had smooth ears and regular shaped tusks, which made distinguishing them very difficult. Eventually, however, I was able to photograph all of them and give them names. The older of the two young females in

the OAs was named Opal and the younger Orabel. Even after naming them I was never absolutely sure if an individual was a CB or an OA. To this day the female I named Orabel is a conundrum. She spent just as much time with the CBs as with the OAs, and eventually appeared to split off to form her own small family.

In all I saw the OAs 35 times in 1977 and ever since then they have been very centrally located in the Park where they are seen frequently. Over the next few years no changes occurred among the members. Orlanda had managed to get her calf through a terrible drought in 1976. Many calves in the other families died. Also during the drought the females had stopped

reproductive cycling altogether. However, soon after conditions improved in December 1976, 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. At times it seemed like babies were falling out of the sky.

The OAs joined the baby boom. In 1980 two calves were born. Opal gave birth to her first calf, a male, in January. Orlanda gave birth the next month to a female. The little family had grown to eight. These new calves caused great excitement among the OAs since the last newborn calf they had in the family was in 1975. The babies were excessively fussed over, fondled and almost certainly spoiled.

Conditions continued to be good for the Amboseli elephants for the next couple of years. Many of the females who had given birth in 1979-80 gave birth again in 1983-84. In 1983 the OA females had four calves: Opal had her second calf in May; Orlanda had a calf in June; Olive had her first calf at the age of 13 in July; and Orabel had her first calf in July. I was surprised that Odette hadn't yet given birth.

In keeping with my system of naming calves when they are four years old, or if their mothers have a new calf, I had given names to the older calves. At the end of 1983 the OA family consisted of the following 12 members:

| INDIVIDUAL | SEX | ESTIMATED OR KNOWN DATE OF BIRTH |
|------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| Orlanda | F | 1955 |
| ORL3 | F | 6-83 |
| Olympia | F | 2-80 |
| Omar | M | 6-75 |
| Olive | F | 1970 |
| OLV3 | M | 7-83 |
| Odette | F | 1962 |
| Opal | F | 1964 |
| OPA3 | M | 5-83 |
| Oscar | M | 1-80 |
| Orabel | F | 1968 |
| OB3 | F | 7-83 |

The population was growing rapidly. However, environmental conditions changed once again. In 1984 Amboseli experienced one of its periodic droughts, but this one was harsher than most. In 1984, the rains basically failed with only a miserly couple of inches falling during what was supposed to be the wet season. It was sad and depressing watching the calves get weaker and weaker and then disappearing. 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 vegetation in their diet to sustain them. In 1984 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.

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 OAs suffered losses during the drought. Opal's '80 male calf, Oscar, and Olive's '83 male both died in November 1984. Fortunately the drought ended later in November with the coming of the rains and the elephants slowly began to recover. During the next few years Amboseli experienced average to higher than average rainfall and the OAs continued to produce more calves, but they also experienced some losses. In April 1985 Odette gave birth to her first calf, a female. The following year there



Odette with her up-curved tusks leads part of the OA family

were two tragic losses. Opal and her '83 calf were speared and died. At the same time Calandre in the CBs was also killed and I suspect the two families were together when the spearing occurred.

Over the next several years life was fairly peaceful for the OAs. There were more births and no deaths of adults. In 1987, Olive gave birth to a daughter making Orlanda a grandmother; in 1988, Orabel had a daughter and at the end of that year Orlanda had another son. Once again, out of sync with the others, Odette had a calf in 1989. Olive had another daughter in 1991. That year, mysteriously Orabel's '88 female died. In 1992 she gave birth to another daughter and that one survived. In 1993, Odette had a son, but this calf died when he was a year old. Even with the losses, by mid-1994, the family had grown to 14 and consisted of the following:

| INDIVIDUAL | SEX | ESTIMATED OR KNOWN DATE OF BIRTH |
|------------|-----|----------------------------------|
| Orlanda | F | 1955 |
| Obarra | M | 12-88 |
| Olwen | F | 6-83 |
| Olympia | F | 2-80 |
| Omar | M | 6-75 |
| Olive | F | 1970 |
| OLV1 | F | 1-91 |
| Ololua | F | 2-87 |
| Odette | F | 1962 |
| OD3 | M | 3-93 |
| Olena | F | 4-89 |
| Odessa | F | 4-85 |
| Orabel | F | 1968 |
| OB2 | F | 1-92 |
| Onyx | F | 7-83 |

While the older females were busy having their third and fourth calves, the younger members of the family were going through transitions. Omar set off to lead an independent life in the late '80s. Typically young males leave around 12-14 years old so he was right on schedule. At the same time that Omar was maturing, some of the female calves were growing up to begin oestrous cycling. They seemed far too small to be pursued by the huge adult males. Twenty-two months later we began to see the results.

The first of the young females to give birth was Olympia, Orlanda's daughter born in 1980. She had her first calf in July 1994. Not to be outdone by her older cousin, Orabel's '83 daughter, Onyx, had a calf in October when she was only 11 years old. Orlanda's younger daughter, Olwen, quickly followed in January 1995 with her first calf, and then Odette's daughter, Odessa, also gave birth in January, when she was only nine years old! Her mother clearly didn't tell her about family planning.

Olive gave birth to her third calf in March 1995, but it died within a few days. Three more calves were born in 1996, to Orlanda, Orabel and Odette. Then there was a break for three years with no births. In 1997 Orlanda lost her '96 calf, the first loss I had ever recorded for her in the 23 years that I had known her. Sadly, the following year Odette's nine-year-old daughter,



Orlanda's daughter Olympia grew up to be another beauty in the OA family

Olena died as a result of a broken leg, after what was probably an accident.

In 1999 and 2000 the OAs had eight calves. Odessa had her second calf in May 1999 and then in December Onyx and Olive gave birth to daughters and Orlanda gave birth to a son.

The following year four more calves

were born to the OA females, Odette, Ololua, Olympia and Orabel. Two more calves were born in 2003 and then in 2004 the OAs had their own baby boom with the birth of seven calves.

The next five years were peaceful and prosperous for the OAs. There were only a few losses: three calves under a year old and one young adult female, Olive's daughter Olerai, who died because of a natural illness. Unfortunately, those good years would soon be over. Amboseli underwent the worst drought in living memory in 2009. Nearly 400 elephants died including 250 calves. In the OA family there were 12 deaths. Most of these

were calves under two years old, but much more devastating three of the big females died: Orlanda, Odette and Olive.

Losing a matriarch is very hard for an elephant family. Orlanda had been their leader for 35 years. She was their anchor and their leader. Normally the family members would turn to the next oldest female, in this case Odette, but she soon died herself, and the third oldest female, Orabel was at the time moving in her own separate subgroup. The fourth oldest female was Orlanda's daughter, Olive but she also succumbed to the drought. It was left to Orlanda's 29-year-old daughter Olympia to guide the family.

Rains finally came in December of 2009 and more rain fell in early 2010. Vegetation grew and the elephants began to recover. It was fascinating to see how the families would respond. Elephants live in a fission-fusion society, which means their social structure is very fluid. They come together, split apart, come together again. We saw this behavior over and over again after the drought. Almost every family had broken down into small sub-units trying to find enough to eat.

Elephant always surprise us. Families we thought had split for good got back together and began to move again as one family. Olympia and Orabel's portions of the OA family coalesced. When Orabel was present she acted as matriarch. When the family split down temporarily Olympia led her section.



Orabel, who was always very independent, came back to be the OA matriarch after the 2009 drought

With the good rain the elephants began to put on weight and began to have energy again. Also for 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 that year there was one stillbirth and one successful birth in June. There are 453 females who would be 12 years

and older in 2012. Conceivably all but the two who have given birth in 2011 could have calves. We were very anxious to see if our prediction of a super baby boom would occur. We were not disappointed.

On October 12, 2011 the first baby was born. Qumquat, matriarch of the QBs, produced a beautiful daughter. A second calf arrived two weeks later to Angelina of the AAs. The dam had broken. Fourteen more followed in November and 29 in December making 45 calves born in the last two and a half months of 2011.

The deluge of calves continued into 2012 and to date 147 calves have been born since Qumquat gave birth in October 2011. And we expect more.



One of 10 new calves in the OA family: Odessa's daughter born in January

These new lives changed the mood of the families completely. Before their arrival the elephants were just recovering from the drought and probably trying to negotiate their new roles in their families. There seemed to be few

interactions and very little play, but with the new calves there was excitement and a lightening of spirits. It was a wonderful thing to watch.

The OA family has been particularly amazing in its contribution to the baby boom. They have had **10!!!** calves just in the first three months of 2012. We are very pleased that Olga and Orlanda's genes that produce such beautiful elephants are carrying on. This family is a total delight to be with. The calves get together in little gangs, run around and play great games. For now they are very lucky elephants. We are doing everything we can to keep their world safe.

The following is the current structure and composition of the OA family including the independent males.

| Family Members | Birth Date | Sex | Mother |
|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------|
| Orabel | Jan-63 | F | Olga |
| ORA12 | Jan-12 | M | |
| Oreste | Mar-05 | M | |
| Open | Sep-00 | F | |
| Omo River | Jan-92 | F | |
| OMR 12 | Feb-12 | M | |
| Oseni | Mar-06 | M | |
| Onyx | Jul-83 | F | |
| Ornella | Dec-99 | F | |
| OLL12 | Jan-12 | M | |
| Oralee | Oct-94 | F | |
| OEE12 | Jan-12 | F | |
| Olympia | Feb-80 | F | Orlanda |
| OLY12 | Mar-12 | F | |
| Owendo | Nov-04 | M | |
| Outlook | Feb-00 | F | |
| OUT12 | Feb-12 | M | |
| Olwen | Jun-83 | F | Orlanda |
| OLW12 | Jan-12 | F | |
| Ouagadougou | Feb-04 | M | |
| Obiero | Dec-99 | M | |
| Ololua | Feb-87 | F | Olive |
| Orlando Bloom | Jul-03 | M | |
| Orora | Dec-99 | F | Olive |
| ORR12 | Jan-12 | F | |
| Okanja | Jul-04 | F | Olive |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Odessa | Apr-85 | F | Odette |
| ODS12 | Jan-12 | F | |
| Owen Wilson | Jul-03 | M | |
| Oriana | May-99 | F | |
| Olya | Jan-95 | F | |
| OYA12 | Mar-12 | F | |
| Opera | Aug-00 | F | Odette |
| Olaf | Mar-04 | M | Odette |
| | | | |
| Independent Males | Birth Date | Male Number | Mother |
| Omar | Jun-75 | 324 | Orlanda |
| Obarra | Dec-88 | 464 | Orlanda |
| Obadiah | Jul-94 | 565 | Olympia |
| Orion | Jan-95 | 600 | Olwen |
| Oasis | Feb-96 | 617 | Orabel |

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