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The Amboseli elephants need your help. ATE's important work relies on your donations.

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Winnie Kiiru Joins the Kenya Board of ATE



Dr. Winnie Kiiru has a long history with the Amboseli Elephant Research Project and ATE. While working for the Kenya Wildlife Service's Elephant Program in 1993, Winnie was introduced to the Amboseli elephants by Joyce

News from the Amboseli Trust for Elephants

January - March 2019

Greetings!

Amboseli is finally drying out after the amazing rainfall of 2018. Some of the usually dry pans remain full of water, and happily for us and any visitors to Amboseli, there are still flamingoes in those shallow lakes.


I'm pleased to report that the elephants continue to look in excellent shape. Although we haven't had rain for a while there is enough grass left for them and the other grazing species. Nevertheless, Amboseli, and all of Kenya, needs rain. The Meteorological Department predicted it would come in late March. We're still waiting.

So far in the first three months of 2019, we have recorded only five births. This is highly unusual and might seem worrying but it's not at all. Almost all the adult females in the population have had calves in the last two-three years. There were simply very few females available to conceive.

Monitoring the Amboseli population so closely saves us from getting panicked about low or excessively high recruitment rates. In many areas of Africa, populations are studied via aerial surveys. Calves are counted and population rates are calculated. If someone had done an aerial count of Amboseli in 2012 they would have said the population was growing at a rapid rate, because that year 201 calves were born. That conclusion would have been wrong. The analysis works for wildebeests, who have a calf every year, but elephants have a four-year calving interval and that has to be considered when determining the rate of growth. Droughts and times of abundance also have an influence.

Amboseli's elephants have gone up and down in numbers over the years. Four hundred died in the drought of 2009. Since then the population has been slowly growing and has reached 1,742. That's neither too many elephants nor too few. As long as we can keep the ecosystem open to them, the Amboseli ecosystem can host a large, healthy population of elephants. We are doing everything we can to achieve that goal.

Cynthia Moss
Director
Amboseli Trust for Elephants

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The Older the Better

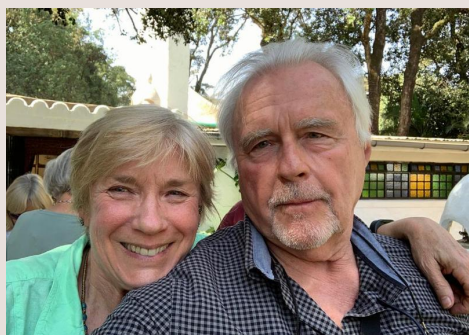
If you are a male elephant, age is an advantage. Males grow throughout their lifetime, which means that a 50-year-old bull is considerably taller than a 35-year-old. He also weighs more, possibly as much as seven tons. In addition, his tusks are growing more rapidly in the last decade of his life than at any other time. In short, a 50-year-old male is a magnificent specimen and a formidable opponent to any younger bull who might want to challenge him.

Poole. Winnie received her Master's Degree from the University of Zimbabwe and her PhD from the University of Kent. For both degrees, her topic was human-elephant interactions. Her PhD research was conducted in the Amboseli ecosystem and her grant was administered by ATE. In 2004, Winnie, along with Petter Granli and John Kioko, carried out a study of human attitudes and interactions with elephants with a grant to ATE from US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Winnie worked for the Born Free Foundation for many years and is currently the Regional Technical Advisor for Stop Ivory. A former board member of KWS, Winnie is very familiar with all the ins and outs of conservation in Kenya and further afield. We know she will be a tremendous asset to ATE. We welcome her to the Kenya board.

Pili Visit

In January we had the great pleasure of having our Director of Science, Professor Phyllis Lee (best known as "Pili") come for a visit. Pili has been working with ATE since 1982 and is a valued member of our team.



Phyllis Lee and Harvey Croze after a productive meeting in Nairobi

Aside from spending time with the researchers and elephants she also met with one of the people who helped Cynthia establish AERP back in 1972, Dr Harvey Croze.

Currently a professor at Stirling University in Scotland, Pili travels to Kenya at least once a year in order to oversee our field work and data collection. She has helped direct our science for several decades; she also gives educational talks and interviews about elephants, and mentors young scientists in the making.

Twin Elephants



Paru's twins: female on the left

We have been asked by so many people how the twins are doing. We are very sorry to have to report that one Paru's twins, the female, died when she was six months old. She was the smaller of the two and at an early stage had sustained an injury to her back, which appeared

The now famous Amboseli elephant, Tim, is an iconic male African elephant with his height and his long, graceful tusks. He just turned 50 years old and is currently in musth, a period when a male's testosterone levels increase greatly and he goes in search of receptive females to mate, while at the same time challenging other males. Musth occurs yearly for a period of about three months. Each male is on his own schedule.

A male has to be in very good condition, with significant fat reserves, to come into musth. We were concerned because Tim did not come into musth in 2017 and 2018. He had been speared at least two times and had to be immobilised by vets to treat him. He had also been stuck in deep, quicksand-like mud and had to be rescued (see our previous newsletter). We noted that he was thinner than he should be and thought he might be fighting a systemic infection. Thus, it was with great joy that we saw him striding into the Park in January with his head high, his chin tucked in, waving his ears, and emitting deep rumbles in typical musth fashion. Tim was back!



Tim with three fat chins; in excellent condition and in full, glorious musth

We weren't the only ones happy to see Tim. Females preferentially mate with the large, musth bulls and try to avoid being mated by younger bulls. They have choice. Most of the time females can outrun a male because they are smaller and lighter, so an experienced female doesn't have to mate with a young, untested male. Females even show their partiality by greeting musth bulls when they arrive at the family with a special vocalization and behaviors we call "the female chorus".

Being older is better. For the male elephant, the advantage is size, weight, and experience. For the females, mating with one of the older males assures that her calf will be fathered by an individual who has in a sense proved himself. He will most likely pass on to his calves his propensity for longevity and robustness.

Personally, we hope Tim will pass on his beauty and his calm and gentle personality to as many Amboseli calves as possible.

[Find our Photos on Instagram](#)

A New Digital Home

Since 1972 we have amassed thousands of pieces of information on thousands of elephants, during thousands of hours of observation. In the earliest days, these data were fed into huge room-sized computers with less processing memory than on a modern smartphone. In 1997 we made a major investment to build a relational database--a database that understands the connections between the different pieces of information. Now, in 2019 we're overhauling the whole system again, and we just held a two-day retreat to capture the team's ideas and needs.

A renovation like this is an enormous investment in time and money. But the processing power of modern computers means we've outgrown the existing structure, at a time when the need to make our data

to heal. We kept a close eye on her and she seemed to be doing well, but then she started to lose weight. We cannot say for sure what caused her death but we can say it was natural. As sad as it is, we are happy that the remaining calf is strong and healthy. Twins in elephants are very rare and few survive into adulthood.

Norah's Leadership Course

Norah Njiraini has been with ATE since 1985, making her the research assistant with the longest tenure--34 years. Over the years she has mentored and trained many young men and women, sharing our knowledge of elephants with others who can make a difference in wildlife conservation. With so much precious knowledge to share, we thought we would give Norah the chance to refresh some of her skills during a three-day course in Nairobi on enhancing leadership capacity. Norah thoroughly enjoyed the chance to return to the student side of the learning equation.

Ways to Support Us

Follow an Amboseli Family with Elatia

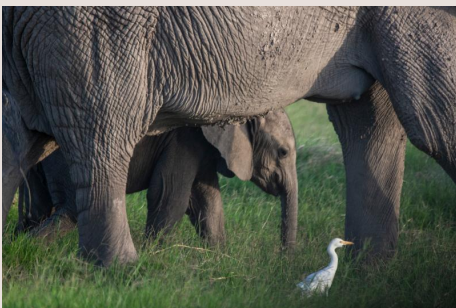


If you want an inside view of elephant lives, consider joining us to follow an elephant family in 2019. We have chosen six Amboseli families for our Elatia program: the AAs, EBs, FBs, GBs, OAs, and PCs. You can choose one or all of the families to follow. Regular updates include photos and videos, and news of what is going on in the family.

To learn more about Elatia go to [This Link](#). If you have any problems, Tal has made a tutorial for signing up, [Click Here](#). You can also contact her directly if you have any questions on:

info@elephanttrust.org.

Name a Baby Elephant



Would you like to have an even closer relationship with the Amboseli elephants? The

understandable and available is greater than ever.



Norah, Fran Michelmores, Root, Cynthia, Tal, Katito and Vicki at the ATE Database Retreat

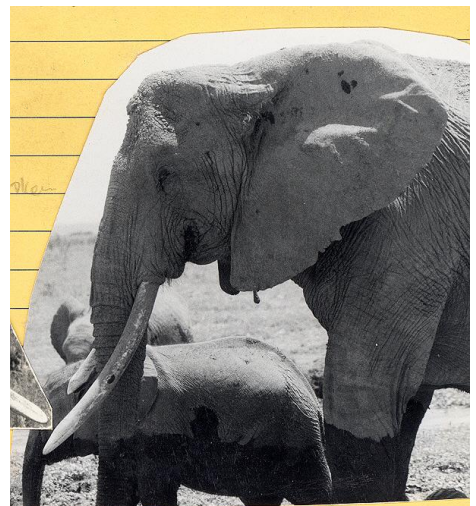
The new database will do a lot of things; it will help us keep track of the population better, it will improve how we capture and store the information we collect, it will help us produce information for local stakeholders more easily, and it will allow us to see where we have gaps in our dataset where we could recruit graduate students or collaborators to help us. Cross checking datasheets is truly a labour of love but in the end, we hope to make the Amboseli elephant information even more accessible to the world, and to honour all the hard work and generous donations that have kept us in the field with the elephants we love so much.

Watch our films on [YouTube](#)

The History of the HB Family

I first met the HB family in August 1975, a month before moving to Amboseli to work full-time on the project. They were in a group of approximately 20 elephants on the west side of the Park. During that first encounter I noticed a large unfamiliar female closely associating with Loretta, a female I had already identified earlier in 1975. This new female was tall and handsome with thick, almost straight tusks. I saw her again two days later in a large group of 100 elephants and confirmed that a teenage female accompanied her. They had some calves with them, but it was hard to be certain which ones belonged to them with so many elephants present. I thought Loretta might have been with them, but I wasn't sure, and then the family disappeared again.

I didn't see them again until June 1976 when I came across a large aggregation of elephants in the north of the Longinye swamp. They were with many other families and submerged in the swamp. A month later I saw them again in Longinye; the big, handsome female, the young female and a calf I thought was between 2 ½ and three years old. In August 1976, a year after my first encounter, I found them close to the place where they were first sighted in a small group of six elephants. Finally, I managed to make good notes on the family structure.



Horatia's ID photo

I estimated the big female to be in her early forties. She had a two to three-year-old calf with her, a seven-year old female calf, and a teenage daughter, who had small breasts, indicating she was pregnant. With them were two other immature elephants, a female I estimated to be around ten years old, and a male aged 8-10 years. I never saw either of these young elephants again.

best way to do so is to name one of many calves in the population.

Unlike our Elatia program where many people follow the same family, our naming program is a unique experience. The calf becomes "your" calf alone and the name you give forms a part of the Amboseli dataset for all time. For more information, please write to us at: info@elephanttrust.org

Give a Gift that Lasts Forever

Designate the Amboseli Trust for Elephants as a beneficiary of your will, individual retirement account, or life insurance policy. To learn more about planned giving opportunities, please contact Betsy Swart:
Email: eswart@elephanttrust.org
Tel +1-508-783-8308.

Big, handsome female	about 40 years old
Calf	2 1/2 years old
Female calf	7 years old
Teenage female	about 16 years old
Adolescent female	about 10 years old
Adolescent male	8-10 years old

To read the full history [Click Here](#).

[Visit our Website](#)

As we move forward with our new and greatly improved database, we are excited about the analysis we can do with it. Of course, we love being out in the field watching elephants, but we also love looking at our data, discovering patterns we hadn't seen before. It is the joy of studying elephants--they continue to surprise and intrigue us. We need to continue our research and we need your help to do it.

Cynthia Moss
Director

