



Amboseli Trust for Elephants July - September 2021

30th September 2021 | Newsletter

Note from our Director

Dear Cynthia,

Since we started the newsletter back in 2010, we have used a platform called Constant Contact. It has worked well for us. Starting this month, they introduced a new editing system to make newsletters and other mailings more readable on phones and tablets. We agree that it is a good idea, but it has also been a challenge for us to get used to the new editor. Those of you who have been receiving our newsletter will note a big change in the layout. You might also find some odd mistakes and confusing placements. Please be patient with us while we adjust.

In the meantime, I just want to say that all is well in Amboseli. The dry season is upon us, but because we had four years of above average rainfall there is vegetation remaining, not just for the elephants but also for wildebeests, zebras, hippos, giraffes and other wildlife. Aerial counts show that there are more wildebeests and zebras in Amboseli than have ever been counted before in the last 40+ years. There are also more elephants, more than 1800. The result is a great deal of pressure on the Park, which makes us all the more anxious to keep the corridors and dispersal areas open in the greater Amboseli ecosystem. We are working hard with our partners on this challenge.

Cynthia Moss

Featured Articles

New Internship Program

ATE has always promoted training and capacity building both for local people and for scientists and wildlife conservationists from across Africa and even Asia. Starting in 1990, for many years we ran 10-day courses for people who were about to start their own studies of elephants. The course taught people how to: 1) approach and work around elephants; 2) sex elephants (something more difficult than one would expect); 3)

count elephants (also not that easy); recognize and photograph elephants for individual recognition; 4) age elephants in the field and by tooth development from dead elephants; and 5) how to collect data, create data sheets, and store data. We had trainees from Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, Chad, Liberia, and Sri Lanka, as well dozens from Kenya. We also did three-day courses for rangers and scouts. Unfortunately, Covid brought our training program to a halt.



Katito and Norah with our first intern John Nairii

With improved conditions and a design for training with only one person at a time, we launched an internship program on September 1. We have interviewed three candidates, focusing on men and women from the surrounding Maasai ranches. Our first intern, John Naini, is now in residence with us in Amboseli. The placements will last for one to two months, which will give interns hands-on experience of working on a research project in all its facets. Interns will spend time with each team member learning different skills, and at the same time they will help with compiling important parts of our digital data. We look forward to once again being able to build capacity with promising candidates from the Amboseli ecosystem.

[Visit our Website](#)

Family Changes Over Time

One of the remarkable things that has happened over the 49 years of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project is the change in the families. In those first years, after we worked out the structure and composition of the families, the average size was seven with a range from 2 to 23. There had been droughts, poaching, and conflict with people. Elephants were dying and being killed. David Western, the ecologist working in Amboseli starting in the mid-60s, estimated that there were about 1200 elephants in that decade. By 1978 when all the families and most of the independent males were known there were only about 700 elephants remaining.

There were 48 families in 1978. The smallest was the YAs, which consisted of just Ysolde and her calf. The largest family was the PAs with 23 members. It has been fascinating following the fate of all the Amboseli elephant families over the subsequent years. Which families did well and which did not succeed?

Poaching of elephants was greatly reduced by the end of the 1970s and the families were more or less left in peace to grow and flourish. However, there were bad times--almost always driven by drought--and good times--when rainfall and thus vegetation was abundant. There were also social and ranging factors that appeared to impact each family. The loss of a matriarch was almost always devastating and could lead to other members dying. Families that ranged in areas with growing human populations and changes in land use were more likely to be speared and killed in conflict situations.

Most of the families grew but a few families died out completely when they no longer had a living adult female. This happened to the BA, GA, NA, PB, QA and TB families. The big PA family grew to 29 and then split into two with 16 going with the matriarch Penelope and 13 going with the second oldest female Phoebe. This was the first split recorded and I thought all families would do this once they reached about 30. I was wrong. Elephants never fit into neat boxes.



In 1973 the TC family numbered six; today it is a formidable family of 49.

Since that first split we have had separations from smaller families and today we have families numbering over 50 (see the IB history in the next article) with no signs of fragmenting. Because of splits, which create new families, there are now 64 families. Of these nine have more than 40 members. Some of the original small families never grew by much, but others have done surprisingly well. The YAs mentioned above with only two members in 1978 now number 13. Probably the most amazing family growth is the P families. From the original single family of 23 at the start of the study, today all the Ps number 127 in seven families, plus 28 independent adult males, making 155 in all.

Currently the average family size is 24. Once in a while we yearn for the days when the average was seven. It was so much easier to complete a census. But at the same time, it is just wonderful and satisfying to see one of the big families, led by an old matriarch, striding across the plains.

To see a visualization of how the Amboseli families fragment and grow [**Click Here.**](#)



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The History of the IB Family

The IB family was first recorded on March 16, 1974. They were found on the eastern side of the Park with the GB and PA families. At that sighting there appeared to be 12 in the new family and it was led by a strikingly

beautiful female with large impressive ears. Photos were taken and an attempt to age the members was made. This family was not seen again until March of the next year and then not again until February 1976.

Starting in 1976, the family was recorded in the Park almost on a monthly basis. It was assigned the letters IB as its family designation. They were often seen with the GB family and I concluded that they were one of the families who had immigrated into the Park from the east when part of their range was converted into farms. Sadly, it was the beginning of substantial habitat loss for wildlife in the Amboseli ecosystem.

Once there were enough sightings and photos taken the family structure emerged. The big beautiful female was definitely the matriarch and she was named Isis. There were two other adult females who were named Inez and Inga. Some of the many extra calves probably belonged to the three females but others must have been offspring of females who had died.

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

Matriarch Isis with her gorgeous big ears



ATE NEWS

ATE-Funded Mentorship Program



Our colleague and ATE Kenya board member, Dr. Winnie Kiiru, created and hosted a residential three-day mentorship program in July at her CHD Conservation Kenya field station just outside Amboseli National Park. It was fully funded by ATE.

Thank You to Our Generous Donors

The following are the top donors who contributed during the past quarter. We are so thankful for your loyalty over this past very difficult year and a half.

Doug Aja
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Deanna Gursky
Sarah Khan
Lehr Family Charitable Fund
Margaret Mueller
Mary Beth Napoli
Mary Jane O'Loughlin

There were 25 students from the local community who were about to enter secondary school. As Winnie describes the program: "Most of the primary schools around Amboseli National park are day schools. We established that the students find it extremely challenging to adapt to boarding high schools. The students are often homesick as they struggle to adjust to a new and largely unfamiliar environment."

The program covered various topics including physical adjustment, emotional adjustment, sharing space with new people, confidence and self-esteem, self-awareness, reproductive health, leadership and practical activities such as making a bed. They were also introduced to the secondary school curriculum and the opportunities available for environmental stewardship. We at ATE are very happy with the outcome and will be supporting this program again next year.

William Ralston
Deryl Santosuosso
Shifting Foundation

Help for Orphaned Children

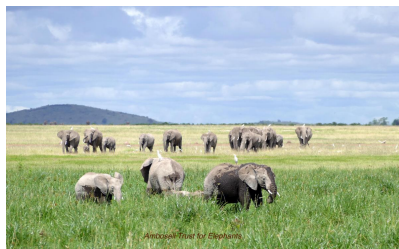


Katito & Sylvi with Teule's Caroline Njau

In August ATE's Sylvi Nyambura and Katito Sayialel visited the Teule Kenya children's home for orphans in Loitokitok. They delivered a donation of four (90kgs each) bags of beans, five (90kgs each) of maize, 76 packets of sanitary towels, 10 bars of soap, and 10 litres of cooking oil. These orphaned children are members of the greater Amboseli community. We heard that they were in need and wanted to help.

Ways to Support US

Join Elatia



You can follow one of Amboseli's famous elephant families. We have chosen six families for Elatia: 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 or questions please contact us directly on: **info@elephanttrust.org**

Give a Gift that Lasts Forever

Name an Elephant Calf



There are presently many calves needing names and more coming up to naming time. 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 write to us at:

info@elephanttrust.org

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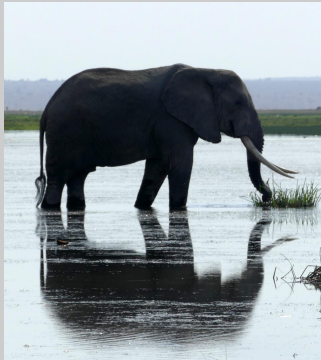
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Make a Donation

We use a secure online system on which you can make your donation with a credit or debit card. All donations exclusively support charities and not-for-profit organizations.

Palmer (in the photo) is peacefully enjoying the cool Amboseli swamp because of the support of our donors.

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