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News from the Amboseli Trust for Elephants

April - June 2021

We've entered the cold season here in East Africa. June, July and August are our "winter" months. It's dark and overcast with temperatures going down into the 50s (10sC) at night. We shouldn't complain though because the rest of the year is glorious. Also, the cloudy days protect the vegetation during the long dry season.

This year we have again had higher than average rainfall so Amboseli is strikingly green and full of nutritious vegetation. Having gone through several devastating droughts, nothing makes us happier than watching fat elephants enjoying vast swaths of grass. Change will come but, in the meantime, we can be delighted.

Our main concern for the future of the elephants is the ongoing sub-division of the group ranches surrounding Amboseli National Park. These ranches, held communally by groups of Maasai, are now being broken up into plots, each of which will be held by an individual. The ranch that surrounds seven-eighths of the Park--Olgulului/Ololarashi--has a very good plan for their part of the ecosystem with zones for settlement, livestock and conservation. They will be setting up a land trust and we at ATE will be supporting their endeavors. At some point in the near future we will be asking you to help us save critical corridors and dispersal areas. The Amboseli Maasai have tolerated and protected wildlife for centuries. We believe that they will continue to do so.



ATE's intrepid researcher Norah Njiraini back from finding elephants with a helicopter. She needs your help to continue her vital work

[Please Donate](#)

Cynthia Moss
Director
Amboseli Trust for Elephants

Thanking Our Generous Donors

We want to thank our generous donors for continuing to support us during a difficult time for everyone. The following are the top donors who contributed during the past quarter. We are so thankful for your loyalty.

Doug Aja
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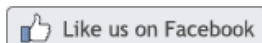


Katito, Tal, and Cynthia (ATE) with Lydia & Ewan from STE

A Visit from STE researchers

In May we hosted two researchers from the Save the Elephants (STE) Bees & Elephants Project based near Tsavo East National Park. Ewan Brennan and Dr Lydia Tiller came to help us check on all our presently active collared males, as well as learn about our work in Amboseli. (STE had helped us in fitting the collars in July and August 2019.)

We have eight GPS collars on young transitional males as part of a long-term study on male independence. These collars have already been on the animals for nearly two years, so it is a good time to check on the status of the devices. Checking on collars is very important, and the STE team have both the experience and equipment to do this. They brought their VHF sensing equipment, which can detect the collar from several kilometers away, so it is not something that disturbs the elephants. Since our males are very young and growing fast, it is important that we monitor each collar's fit as we don't want the collars to get tight. It is also important to check if the VHF works in case the GPS device in the collar fails. While these collars are quite robust, it is important to have a backup method of finding them should anything go wrong. This exercise proved very useful and we also got the chance to learn what STE are currently working on as well as discussing possible future collaborative research. We would like to extend our gratitude to the STE team and we look



Telling Elephant Stories

by Prof Phyllis Lee, ATE Director of Science

What does it take to be a "good science communicator" and does this matter? We have long argued that being able to see the lives of animals such as the Amboseli elephants in the form of stories is vital to our appreciation of their complex lives and to enabling others less privileged than us to appreciate and gain insight into those lives.

There was a recent opinion piece in the journal *People and Nature* on "fakery" in wildlife films by Somerville and colleagues. While we agree that interfering with animal (or plant) behaviour to create a better story is unacceptable, we disagree with their premise that naming animals, using human terms such as "families", or telling a gripping story is "fake".

Why diminish the human tendency to name? We name rivers, mountains, trees, dogs and cats; we tell and have told stories about the world around us since language became part of being human. Anthropologists, museum curators, teachers and social scientists all provide evidence that "storification" is an incredibly valuable way of creating connections between diverse peoples, or between people and the natural world.

The old chestnut of "anthropomorphism" is often brandished to disparage the quality of the science of those who "name" or "personify" individuals. Such besmirching has gone on for years, and it is not helpful to the aims of conservation or the understanding of the socioecology of a species. Anthropomorphism can encourage empathy. For us, names are a mnemonic convenience, containing information about birth, maternity, kinship and so on. This is why we use strict naming procedures to sustain names as repositories of information. "Tim" wasn't just a beautiful older male, he was a known calf born to the TD family, to a mother (Trista), in a specific year (1969).



Tim was beloved by the Maasai community. When he died, grown men cried. There would have been the same reaction even if he was only known by his code number 234. He was an individual with many stories and people cared about him.

Naming creates connections whether elephant or orca. Calling kin units "families" is a convenience, and it is a useful descriptor of the consistent close-knit mother-calf groupings that we observe. Unless the last 49 years of observations of maternity along with our genetic kinship studies are to be ignored, "families" is exactly what we see: supportive communal offspring care and rearing units. The large number of researchers working with animal personalities would never dispute the individuality of animals. Assigning "leadership", "patience" and "parenting" to animals is hardly a projection of "predominantly western values", as some suggest.

forward to working together again in future.



Dr Lydia Tiller checking on Esposito's collar



Esposito with his collar showing above his head



Ewan checks the VHF signal from Garango's collar with Katito

Cynthia Appointed KWS Honorary Warden

There are other issues with the critique of anthropomorphism. We wonder who gets to define which stories are "allowed", and to decide what is "factual" as opposed to another interpretation? Story-telling blends fact, imagination and futures. In a biodiversity emergency we need to encourage all possible ways for reconnecting with the natural world. Story-telling, naming and descriptive terms like families that resonate with all of us people helps to rebuild relationships of coexistence between us and other animals. From speculative nonfiction to narrative film, we endorse "personalisation" of individual animals and dramatic storytelling because yes, other animals are "battling against the odds, fighting for survival". And their plight is ours.

(With thanks for the input from Kate Nowak, Safina Center fellow)

Find our Photos on Instagram

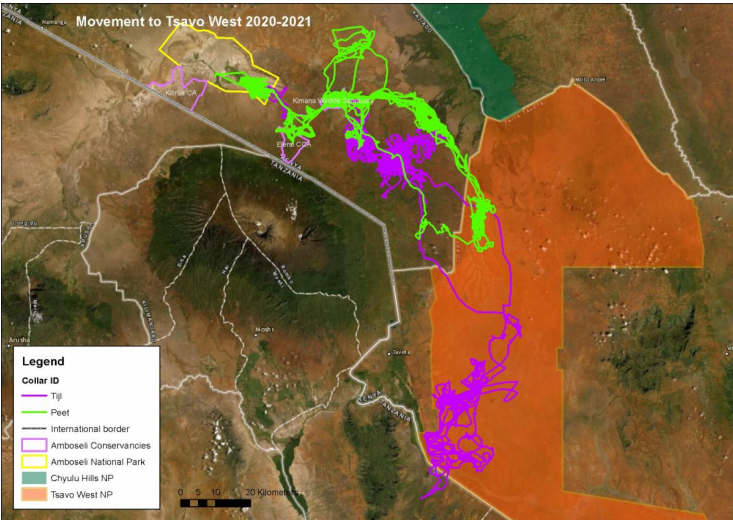
Wandering Males

Amboseli is not a closed population: the elephants born into our study families move to outlying areas, interacting with elephants we don't know. This ranging is important for reproductive exchange because gene flow is vital for small populations like Amboseli's. Recording detailed movements is also important for defining the space elephants need, and how they affect human communities in the areas they use.

When we started our male independence study we expected the males to wander. We chose them for exactly that reason: we wanted to see how these teenagers leave the areas their families use and learn about new places, developing the ecological strategies they will need to grow into large, successful males. We targeted males we thought would move in different directions.

Approximately 30% of our elephants cross the border into Tanzania by moving southwest from Amboseli. Others move to the north and west. To the east of Amboseli lies the vastness of Tsavo, but we knew relatively little about the connection between these iconic Kenyan landscapes. We knew that Tsavo families moved across the Kuku and Mbirikani group ranches, sharing space with some of the Amboseli elephants. We also knew that they rarely came as far as our central study area, and that sometimes big males also made this journey. But that was about it. We had no confirmed record of an Amboseli elephant in Tsavo. Our collars changed all of that.

One of the males we collared in August 2019 was at the time an 11-year old called Tiji from the TD family (the famous Tim's family). At his collaring Tiji was given the added name of Lenku by the Cabinet Secretary for Tourism, Najib Balala, to honor the Governor of Kajiado County, Joseph ole Lenku. A second male collared at that time was Peet, also 11 years old, from the PA4 family. Both were going independent but still spending time with their families. We knew that the TD and PA families moved east when they left the Park but we did not know how far they went.



Tiji-Lenku and Peet have shown us the connectivity between Amboseli and



Photo credit: Rupi Mangat

The Kenya Wildlife Service has appointed our director, Cynthia Moss, as an honorary warden for a period of three years. Her role is to support KWS in its mission to protect and conserve wildlife and protected areas.

Ways to Support Us

Follow an Amboseli Family with Elatia



Echo's daughter Enid is the current leader of the EB family. You could follow this family by joining our Elatia program. We have chosen six Amboseli 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

Name a Baby Elephant

Tsavo more clearly than we could have hoped for: both of them have moved as far as Tsavo West National Park, and Peet almost made it to Chyulu Hills National Park. Tiji-Lenku, however, has been our star wanderer, moving to right down to the Tanzanian border in Tsavo and spending several weeks there, before returning to Amboseli (see map). We have collaborated with Save the Elephants (see sidebar) to check on him during his travels, and we look forward to using these results with our partners to fight for the space elephants need to make these impressive and crucial movements.

Watch our films on [YouTube](#)

The History of the FA Family

The FA family was discovered and photographed on the second day of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project on September 2, 1972. On that morning so long ago, there were 11 elephants in the group. We photographed all the adults. It wasn't until the following year that we worked out who was in the family. It turned out that some of the individuals present on the first sighting were members of another family, the FBs. The FAs appeared to have a close relationship with them, but we determined that the FAs were a small family of five.



Beautiful Filippa photographed on the 2nd of September 1972

The matriarch was a beautiful, big female who was named Filippa. In 1973 she was with a year-old calf. Also present was a young adult female who we assumed was Filippa's daughter. She was called Fiona. There were two immature females eventually named Fenella and Fifi.

Filippa	Adult F
C'72	M
Fiona	Young adult F
Fenella	Immature F
Fifi	Immature F

Over the next few years when they were sighted we saw the FAs with other adult females. During the 1970s there was a great deal of poaching in Kenya and throughout Africa. Amboseli did better than some places but there were still many losses. The result was that some females lost their families completely and became what we called "floaters". They joined other families for a day or a week or in a few cases for good. The FAs were sometimes seen with Pie, an adult female with a big pie-shaped cut in her ear; Pie's female calf, who was called Fabia; and another adult female named Mary. I wish we had DNA from these females.

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

Visit our Website

I think the articles in this newsletter have been particularly interesting and provocative. It is so important that we continue to tell the stories of the Amboseli elephants. By supporting ATE you



are helping us to do that.

Cynthia Moss
Director

This chunky little male calf was recently named by a donor. 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, 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.

