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Phyllis Lee asks...

Care to Donate now?

(Prof. Lee is Chair of ATE's Scientific Advisory Committee)

Binoculars

In the last issue of the Newsletter we made a plea for two new pairs of binoculars. I'm very happy to report that some good friends of ATE, Mia Celano and Skip Dunn, came through and bought two pairs of top-of-the-line Zeiss binoculars. They even organized to get them delivered by hand. They'll be arriving September 11. Norah and Katito are so pleased. It will make such a difference to their field work.

Video Cameras

We have a new plea. We have decided that it is important to get as much information as possible out to the public about how wonderful elephants are and what we lose when they are slaughtered for their tusks. One of the best ways we

News from the Amboseli Trust for Elephants August 2011

Greetings!

It's been an odd July and August in Amboseli. The Park is full of elephants. Usually in these two months, and especially in August, the elephants go off somewhere to feed and we have trouble finding groups. For years now I've been calling this time, with some frustration, the elephants' August holidays.

We are happy to have them in the Park but we suspect the reason they are there may not be good. We believe that the elephants feel safe in the Park and they're not going out on their usual treks because bad things have happened to them in the outlying areas. We are seeing families on a regular basis that in any other year would be spending most of their time in Tanzania. One of the collared elephants, Maureen of the MBs, is a case in point. The MBs are more Tanzanian than Kenya - we say they hold dual passports. However, since collaring Maureen on July 29 she and her family have not crossed the border. In fact, if you look at the red dots on the map in the following story you will see that they went right up to the border and then turned around and went back towards the Park.

Things are peaceful for the Amboseli elephants right now. When we are out with the families they are very relaxed indicating that they have not been harassed in any way recently. It's a joy being with them when they are calm and stress-free. At the same time we know that they need access to the whole ecosystem not just the Park and its immediate surroundings. We want them to go on their normal wet and dry season migrations and this is why we have to secure the whole ecosystem for the elephants and the other wildlife. We need a safe ecosystem now and in the future.

With thanks for your interest and support,

Cynthia Moss
Director
Amboseli Trust for Elephants

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Collaring for Corridors -- Mapping Critical Paths -- Harvey Croze

Let's say it once more: without access to the ecosystem surrounding the relatively tiny Amboseli National Park, the Park, the wildlife including the world's best-known elephants would be reduced to zoo-like numbers.

During the last week of July, ATE bit the bullet -- rather, the immobilization dart -- and in a record-breaking six hours, fitted adult females in five key families with GSM transmitting collars. Ida, Lobelia, Vicky, Willow and Maureen (of the IB, LB, VA, WA and MB families, respectively) are now beeping away, sending position reports every hour.

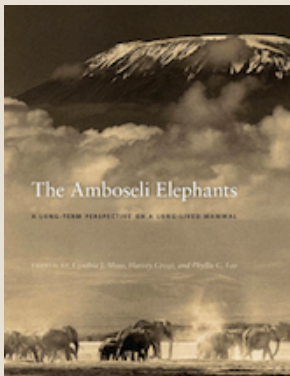
The smoothness of the operation was thanks to the cooperation of a skilled group of like-minded experts: the superb KWS vet team led by Dr. Ephantas Ndambiri with his researcher and ranger support staff; two ATE collaborators (Drs. Max Graham of Space for Giants and Henrik Rasmussen of Savannah Tracking, who built the collars); and the ATE research team, whose specific knowledge of elephant identities and demographic status is unequalled anywhere in the world.

None of us present -- and the combined expertise spanned five decades and hundreds of elephant operations -- recalled an event in

could do that is through short videos shown on YouTube (see the link to our own ATE channel below), on Facebook and our website. We see so many amazing things when we are out with the elephants and we would like to share them with you and others.

At the moment we are using an old video camera of mine. We would like to get two new cameras with HD video capability and keep one in each of the vehicles that are usually out most days with the elephants. Any advice on which ones to get would be helpful. Once we make the decision we hope someone will want to donate one or both.

View our videos on 



Amboseli Book

The Amboseli Elephants: A Long-Term Perspective on a Long-Lived Mammal is still getting fine reviews and selling steadily. You can order your very own copy on [Amazon](#) or direct from the [University of Chicago Press](#).

Newsletter Archive

Want to browse past ATE Newsletter issues? You can visit the Archive on our website by clicking [here](#).



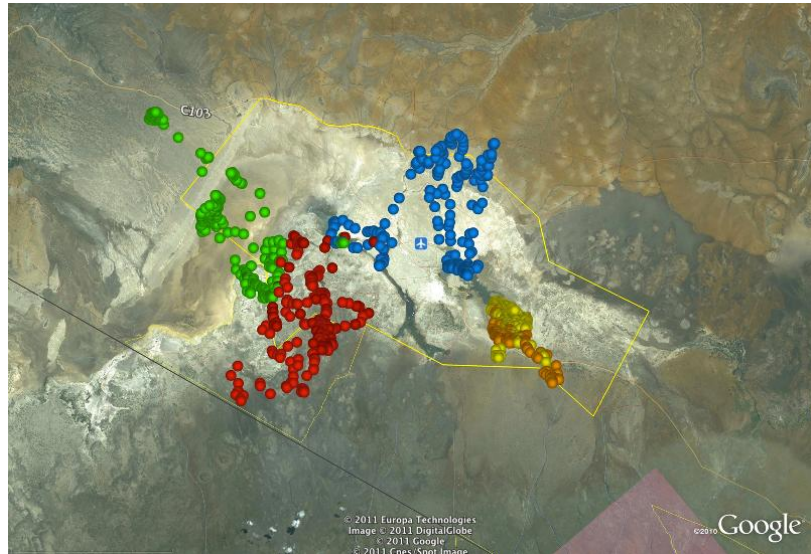
Vicky with her new collar

which five specific 'target' elephants were collared in the space of one morning without use of helicopters. In all but one of the collarings there was virtually no disturbance to the elephants (nor to any visitors). Each of the ladies, chosen to be non-matriarchs, except for Vicky, whose defunct collar was removed and a new one replaced, between 20 and 42 years old without a calf younger than 2 years old, was back with her family within 15 minutes of the dart going in (actually, Ida got up quickly, but stood around dozing and dusting for about an hour).

Friends say to me, 'But don't you know enough about where the elephants go without having to jeopardize their trust by jabbing them in their bottoms?'. I answer that we need objective information on the paths the

elephants need to follow in the ecosystem in order to build a strong case for their future corridors and easements. The operation is like taking your child to the family doctor for an inoculation. It may be a bit of a shock, but the long-term benefits are unquestionable, and trust returns quickly to smart, much-loved kids.

Already the collared females are painting their favourite routes (see map) and there are tantalizing portends of their regular paths into the ecosystem. How far will the MAs (red dots) venture into Tanzania? Will the WAs (green) move as far west as Namanga? Will the VAs head north 40kms to the Selenkey Conservancy? Stay tuned...



Good News from a Graduate of ATE's Training Program

The Amboseli Trust for Elephants has run a training program for scientists and wildlife

managers who are going to be studying elephants in their home countries. Started in 1994, the program was intended for citizens of African countries that have elephants. Our first two trainees were from Ethiopia. Since then we have trained people from Chad, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Some of these trainees have gone on to hold very important jobs in the wildlife sector.

Devised as a 10-day course run by our Training Coordinator, Norah Njiraini, students learn: how to approach and work around elephants, how to observe them, how to take photographs and build up an individual recognition file, how to age and sex elephants, how to design data sheets, and more.

This training program was fully supported by a generous donor for many years and during that time we were able to pay all the costs for each trainee including airfares to and from their home countries. At the moment the training program is not fully funded so a potential trainee has to find some additional support.

At times we have taken on students who are not African citizens if we feel that they will be working on good elephant projects in Africa or Asia. In these few cases the trainee pays the basic costs. In one case we had two scientists from Sri Lanka and in another we had an Australian woman who was working in Zimbabwe.

I have just had news of our Australian trainee and I have to say I am very proud of what she has accomplished. Sharon Pincott came to us in 2002 for training. She was already an interesting exception. She had left a very well-paying, high-powered job as an the information technology director for Ernst & Young Associates in Australia to follow her heart.

Sharon's heart was with elephants after her first encounter with one in South Africa. In 2001 she left her job, moved to Zimbabwe and became a full-time volunteer studying and monitoring a small population of elephants living on land next to Hwange National Park. In 1990 President Mugabe had given these elephants special protection and they became known as the Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe. The 450 elephants currently making up this population are remarkably habituated to vehicles, so much so that they come right up to Sharon's vehicle and get a scratch on the trunk from her or a kind word.

I had been in touch with Sharon over the years, but the last I heard from her she had had to leave Zimbabwe because the situation for her was dangerous and untenable. She was constantly being harassed and investigated. Then two weeks ago I read a recent article describing the way that Sharon can "talk to" elephants and discovered that she had returned. I got in touch and was very happy to hear her news. Most important and welcome was the news that Mugabe had just reaffirmed the Presidential Decree protecting the elephants she has spent a decade fighting for.



Sharon Pincott back with her Beloved Elephants

Sharon has written two books. One was published in 2009 and is called "The Elephants and I"; it is available through Amazon. Her second book, "Masakhe", will be out next year. A documentary film about her will be released in 2012.

Sharon is an amazingly brave and dedicated woman. Although our training only played a tiny part in what Sharon has accomplished we are pleased we had any role at all in protecting a very special group of elephants in Africa. We wish Sharon the best of luck over the coming years.

Like us on Facebook 

The History of the JA and JA2 Families

The JA family is one of the best known of the 64 elephant families in Amboseli. It is a favorite of many of the researchers who have worked on the Amboseli Elephant Research Project. I think we all like the family so much because it was, for 19 years of the study, led by the magnificent matriarch Jezebel. She died in her late 50s in 1993 and at the time was one of the oldest elephants in the population. She had beautiful, long, elegantly-curved tusks, which were exceptional for a female. In fact, Jezebel's tusks caused confusion at the very beginning of the study.

My colleague Harvey Croze and I first met Jezebel and her family on February 24, 1974. We photographed the adult females and some of the juveniles and when we developed and printed the pictures we gave the adult females names: Jezebel, Jessica and Juliet.

Some months before this we had found a large aggregation of elephants and had photographed as many individuals as we could, including adult males. One handsome male was given the number M5. We pasted his picture in the male recognition file. It wasn't until sometime in 1975 that I noticed that this "male" was Jezebel. The photograph just showed the head, ears and tusks from head on; with her large tusks Jezebel looked like a bull!

The JA family lives on the western side of the Park and moves outside the boundaries to the southwest towards and into Tanzania. In April 1974, when we were trying to get information on the movements of the Amboseli elephants, we radio-collared three females. One of these was Sona the matriarch of the SB family. It turned out that the JAs and SBs formed a bond group along with the YAs. We did not know this at the time we darted Sona. She just happened to be the female we came upon



Jezebel in 1975 with her son Jerome and other family members; it is easy to see why she was mistaken for a male

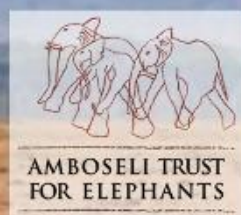
when we were looking for a western elephant. In fact we had not even seen this family before. She was named after she was darted. Once we started following her we realized that she had a special relationship with Jezebel and her family and with another family led by a very large, old female whom I called Yolanda. These three families moved together much of the time.

To read the full story of the families go to the Elephant Trust website: [Full story](#)

Follow us on 

Just as I was about to send out this e-newsletter I read that 1041 elephant tusks had been intercepted in Zanzibar. They represent the deaths of at least 521 elephants (some elephants are one-tusked). Probably most occurred in Tanzania but some of them may have been Amboseli elephants that use both sides of the border. It is very discouraging considering that it is estimated that only 10% of illegal goods are ever detected. We must fight this trade or we're going to lose Africa's elephants. Please help in any way that you can.

*Cynthia Moss
Amboseli Trust for Elephants*



The Amboseli Trust for Elephants aims to ensure the long-term conservation and welfare of Africa's elephants in the context of human needs and pressures through scientific research, training, community outreach, public awareness and advocacy.

