

News from ATE - September

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Dr. Vicki Fishlock is ATE's Resident Scientist. She is asking you to help keep her in the field.

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News from the Amboseli Trust for Elephants

September - November 2017

I have to admit that this has not been an easy year. Back in 2009 Amboseli experienced the worst drought in living memory. I didn't expect to see another year like that one, but 2017 has proven to be very harsh and people and wildlife have suffered.


In 2009 nearly 400 elephants died; this year we've lost many calves, and most painful for me personally, five of the older females: Abigail, Amelia, Felicity, Renata and Brita. They were individuals who were here when I started; all became matriarchs during the time I knew them. Their families will miss them; I will miss them terribly having known them for more than 40 years. I try to tell myself that they led long and productive lives, and each died peacefully of natural causes. We've been able to give them that, but it still hurts.

As I write, rain has finally come to Amboseli and with it will come new, nutritious vegetation. Elephants are flexible and resilient; they will cope and new life will come. And we will be there to watch them and follow their lives.

Cynthia Moss

Director

Amboseli Trust for Elephants

 Like us on Facebook

We Thank these Generous Donors for their Vital Support

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A New Baby for ATE (this time not an elephant)



Shanara and Celestine

Our excellent bookkeeper, Celestine Mmboga, gave birth to a beautiful daughter in June this year. Shanara Chiriga is now five months old and we love seeing her when she comes to the office.

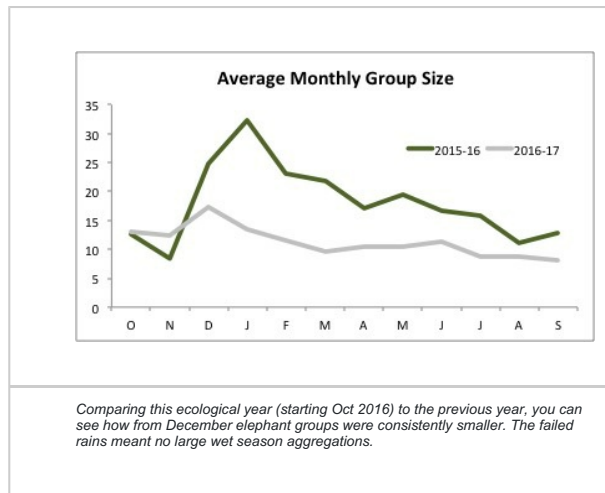


Drought Strategies: EAs as a case study



We have known since the start of the year that this wasn't going to be an easy time. The "short rains" (October-November) of 2016 had been poor and while 2017 kicked off with rainfall over every month, it wasn't anything like enough. We measure our ecological year from the start of the rains (when plants start growing), through the "long rains" of March-May, to the end of the long dry season, so it starts in October and ends in September each year. By the end of this long dry season we were officially in drought conditions. Not that we needed the rain calculations to tell us: in the past three months we have seen many zebra, wildebeest, cattle, giraffe, and antelopes die across the ecosystem.

Elephants can browse and graze, so their more varied diet helps them to an extent. Even more helpful is the flexible social systems of elephants. In low rainfall years, the members of a family unit spend less time together than normal, as they break down into sub-units to reduce competition between females. While this year



Comparing this ecological year (starting Oct 2016) to the previous year, you can see how from December elephant groups were consistently smaller. The failed rains meant no large wet season aggregations.

the elephants haven't been untouched by the hard times, they are doing better than other species.

It isn't easy to watch the elephants going through a drought. We miss their fun spirit and feel for them as they plod through the days, heads down and without their usual sparkle. But we still keep going with our work. Documenting their groupings during the tough times can really help us understand more about what elephants need in order to make it through the hardest periods. It is important information for understanding our population dynamics, but the data can also provide insights for elephants elsewhere.

The EA family is a large and successful family with 41 members and 18 independent males (aged 14-37). Their matriarch is Eloise, born in 1964, with a strong leadership component from 47-year-old Elfrida, daughter of the previous matriarch Estella. Estella was wildly successful and 73% of the family are her direct descendants (daughters, granddaughters and great-grandchildren). When the family splits into smaller groups, it's usually along those lines.

Like the other elephant families, the EA groups have been unusually small this year, and strikingly so compared with the 2011-12 good rainfall year (see graph). Not only have they changed their absence periods (the blank spaces on the graph mean we didn't see them that month) but the family cohesion has dropped significantly too. In fact we haven't seen them all together at all during the past 12 months. For a family that just a couple of years ago was spending about 10% of time all together (rather than in groups 1km or so apart), this is a significant change. Given their large size, the EA family have been very cohesive but this year has been too hard for the family to keep to that pattern.

Different ecological strategies during the hard times might explain part of the change in family cohesion. At 53 years old, Eloise is becoming an older lady, and her body condition has been declining in dry seasons, showing her shoulders and hips prominently and sharp cheekbones (see photo). She has elected to stay fairly resident this year, while Elfrida and her sisters continue to range more widely. We

Ever Vigilant: Trump and Hunting

Many of you will have seen the public outcry after Trump claimed he was going to lift the ban on trophy imports to the US. The rationale behind this decision is that those people who pay thousands to shoot endangered species should be allowed to do so because the money "benefits conservation". At ATE we are deeply skeptical of this model (see also a recent New York Times article [Here](#)), and we believe it's an ethically corrupt policy.

The good news is that the outcry forced the President to tweet a "hold" on the policy change. The bad news is that tweets are not legally binding and we have to stay vigilant. Combating this assault on endangered elephants, lions and other wildlife is a long and worthy battle.

We will keep you posted...



Cynthia is Jake's Hero

We love hearing from our supporters, and many of you get in touch via our Facebook page. This year we were especially touched to hear from Shannon Frodge whose son Jake nominated Cynthia as his superhero for a school project. Last week we got this lovely picture of Shannon and Jake. We are so proud that Cynthia continues to inspire people to get excited about animals and the natural world - and elephants of course!

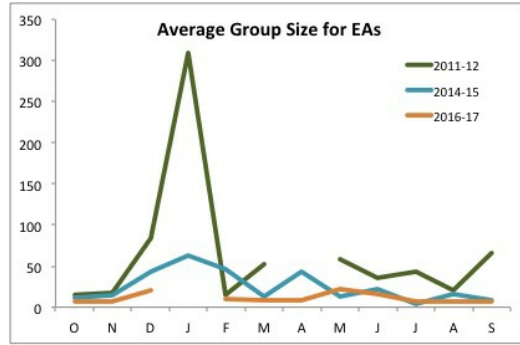


Jake and Shannon Frodge



Ways to Support Us

Follow an Amboseli Family with Elatia



The EA family pattern is striking, comparing the past two ecological years to 2011-12 which was a good rainfall year. The big spike in 2011-12 corresponds to large wet season groups, composed of hundreds of elephants socialising.

wait, as always, to see how things pan out, and look forward to the time when, having counted up the losses, we can see the elephants flourishing again.

Watch our films on [YouTube](#)



There are 53 elephant families in the Amboseli population. Six of our families feature in our Elatia program which allows you to sign up and follow your chosen family. The regular updates include photos and videos, and news of what is going on for the family.

On top of everything else.... Car Trouble

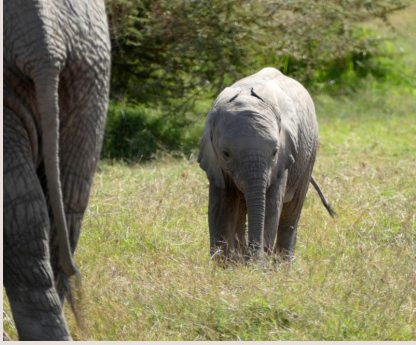
We love our cars. They are the workhorses of our lives, and they serve us well, bringing us close to the elephants we love and letting us follow them across the ecosystem. But bad roads are bad news for cars and the Amboseli roads have really disintegrated over the past few years. Now we drive along "corrugations" - like the sand on the seabed, the fine dirt settles into waves driven by fissures in the bedrock of the fine Amboseli soils. This sets up a vibration frequency that is slowly but surely shaking our cars to pieces, damaging electrics and causing fires, flats and other disasters.



In the past two months alone we have had to spend around \$8,000 on parts and repairs - a huge amount for a small organisation like ours - and lost countless days in the field as we fetch mechanics and wait for parts. It's particularly bad timing as the harsh drought conditions have increased our need to travel for the consolation program and to verify the identity of elephant carcasses. To put it simply, our car troubles are making an already heartbreaking time a lot more difficult. As Cynthia says below, if you are considering a donation to us as the year draws to a close, we appreciate any help we can get to keep us moving!



Name a Baby Elephant



This calf needs a name. In fact, she's just one of many calves in Amboseli who need names.

Unlike our Elatia program where many people follow the same family, our naming program is a unique experience. The calf becomes "your" calf and yours 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

iGive

One of the ways you can support ATE is by making your online purchases through iGive. If you sign up the Amboseli Trust for Elephants as your recipient organization we will get a small percentage of the sale. Connect with [iGive](#).

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 eswart@elephanttrust.org
Tel +1-508-783-8308.

The History of the BC Family

The individuals who were eventually assigned the family code BC were first sighted and photographed in August 1975. They were seen a group of 20. Among them was a very old female who had been seen previously. We called her Loretta but we didn't know which family she belonged to. Sadly she died by the end of that year, but in time I decided from behavior and resemblances that she had been the matriarch of the family we later called the BCs.



Beda's first ID photo from 1977

It must have been a blow for the others to lose her because they were relatively young and she was an experienced leader of around 50 years old. I had only seen the BCs that one time in 1975 before Loretta disappeared. I didn't see them at all in 1976 despite the fact that I had set up a permanent camp and was monitoring the elephants almost on a daily basis.

I began to see them regularly in 1977 and recorded them on 12 occasions. Where they were in 1976 is a mystery. Even though I had seen them 13 times I was still having trouble deciding who belonged in the BC family. I often saw them with the JB family led by Justine and then also with the HB family led by Horatia. When they were together it was as if they were one family, but because I had seen the BCs without these two other families several times I concluded that they were a unique family.

It wasn't until 1978 that I felt confident to say that the BC family consisted of the following members:

Individual	Sex	Estimated Year of Birth
Beda	F	1953
Bronwen	F	1961
Blossom	F	1963
Beulah	F	1966
Brenna	F	1966
Young Male	M	1967
Bianca	F	1967
Brita	F	1972

To read the whole history of the BCs [Click Here](#) for the histories, which are in alphabetical order, and scroll down to the BCs.

[Visit our Website](#)

Our car troubles have been truly disrupting. I am hoping that you, our generous donors, can help us with the cost of the repairs. Our Land Rovers are such an important part of the project and when they break down we can't be out with the elephants. Even small donations would be greatly appreciated.

Cynthia Moss

Director