

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.



Matriarch Isis with her gorgeous big ears

Isis	F	about 40 years old
Calf	F	5-6
Inez	F	about 23
Calf	M	3
Inga	F	about 13
Immature	M	9-10
Immature	F	8-9
Immature	M	8-9
Immature	M	7-8
Immature	M	7-8
Calf	F	5-6
Calf	F	4

From the time I first met the IBs until 1979 it appeared that no new calves were born to the family. There was a serious drought in 1976 so that was not surprising. Once the drought ended and the females gained condition they started to conceive. The three adult females each gave birth in 1979; Isis and Inez had daughters and Inga had a son.

By now the IBs were definitely residents of Amboseli National Park using Longinye Swamp in the daytime and going out to the lower slopes of Kilimanjaro at night. It was a wise move on the part of their leader Isis because the IBs thrived. Over the next four years, four more calves were born. Isis and Inez gave birth in 1982 and Inga had a calf in 1983. Three of the young females were reaching maturity. One of them, who was now named Iola, had her first calf in 1983. The other two young females were named Iona and Ivy. Three of the young males left to become independent, as all teenaged males do. By the end of 1983 the family numbered 15:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth
Isis	F	1936
ISI82	M	Apr-83
Isodora	F	Nov-79
Irma	F	1971
Inez	F	1949
INE82	F	Jul-82
Ilka	F	Mar-79
Issur	M	1973
Inga	F	1963
ING83	F	Apr-83
Ira	M	Dec-79
Iola	F	1968
IOL83	F	May-83
Iona	F	1970
Ivy	F	1972

All was going very well for the IBs but then there was a severe drought in 1984. Many elephants died from the drought and from competition with the local community. In times of drought the Maasai and their cattle and the elephants and other wildlife all concentrate around the central Amboseli swamps and are basically on top of each other. Under these conditions competition and conflicts occur. Elephants sometimes kill cows that they come upon and are frightened of because they are associated with man, and then in retaliation the Maasai spear elephants. To aggravate matters in 1984 the Maasai had promoted a new warrior set and the combination of the drought and scores of young men out to prove their bravery was devastating for the elephants. In all 67 elephants died during 1984: 11

adult females, 13 adult males, three juveniles, 13 weanlings, five second-year calves, and 22 first year calves.

Under the wise leadership of Isis, the IBs did better than some of the Amboseli families. The IBs had had only one death—Irma, Isis's daughter, died of illness—up until drought. Then in 1984-85 three calves died and one of the young males who had gone independent succumbed to an illness. Fortunately, the drought broke at the end of 1984 and a relatively peaceful period followed right up to the 90s.



Ilene, Ivy's daughter born in 1985, today in 2021 at age 36

Female elephants reach sexual maturity at around 10-12 years old and will have their first calf around 13-15 years old. Iola had had her first calf in 1983 at age 15 and sadly this calf died in the drought; Iona gave birth to her first calf at age 14 at the height of the drought in October 1984 and he died a few

months later; and Ivy had a first calf in February 1985 at age 13, and miraculously this calf lived and she is alive today.

While females stay in their natal family for the rest of their lives males leave around the time of sexual maturity starting as young as 10 but usually around 12-14 years old. There are a few mama's boys who have stayed until 18 and 19 years old. Males are not forcibly removed as has sometimes been reported but the pull to the independent life is strong. Some leave abruptly, others gradually spending a few days away and then coming back until they finally leave for good. Four of the IB males had left--Izzy, Issur, Ira and Icarus--by the end of the 1990s.

The amazing Isis was leading her family wisely. Four calves were born in 1987 and then from 1990 through 1999, 25 calves were born. At the end of 1999 they numbered 35 with four independent males:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	
Isis	F	1936	
ISI99	M	Dec-99	
Isabella	F	Jan-90	
Ivana	F	Dec-94	
Icarus	M	Apr-83	
Isodora	F	Nov-79	
ISO99	F	Apr-99	
Ilmerisheri	M	Nov-93	
Inez	F		
INE98	F	Jul-98	
Isaiah	M	Dec-94	
Idris	M	Dec-90	
Iten	M	May-87	
Ilka	F	Mar-79	
ILK97	F	Apr-97	
Ipii	F	Mar-93	
Inga	F	1963	
ING99	F	Dec-99	
Indigo	F	Feb-96	
Inkasuya	M	Dec-91	
Isiola	F	Mar-87	
Ida	F	Apr-83	
Iola	F	1968	
IOL99	M	Dec-99	
Issac	M	Dec-94	
Isuka	M	Mar-87	
Iona	F	1970	
ION99	F	Nov-99	
Ignacio	M	Mar-95	
Ismail	M	Jan-90	
Ivy	F	1972	
IVY99	F	Mar-99	
Idony	F	Jan-95	
Imtiaz	M	Mar-90	
Ilene	F	Feb-85	
Independent Males	Code No	Birthdate	Mother
Izzy	224	1970	?
Issur	241	Jan-73	Inez
Ira	316	Dec-79	Inga
Icarus	380	Apr-83	Isis

The IBs were a formidable and very successful family. However, there are always stumbling blocks in the lives of elephants. In 2000, the second oldest female, Inez, was speared and died. Her two-year-old calf died with her. There were more deaths in the 2000s, but there was one that was particularly devastating. In 2008, Isis died. We think it was a natural death of old age. She was estimated to be 62 years old. Her family and we who studied her miss her to this day. The leadership was taken over by Inga.



Inga in 2006 two years before taking over as matriarch

Sadly, Inga was the matriarch for less than a year. Nature dealt a dreadful hand to everyone in Amboseli. Not enough rain fell for two years in a row and then in the third year, 2009, there was barely any rain at all. Amboseli experienced the worst drought in living memory. People, livestock and wildlife all suffered. Eighty percent of the cattle died; 83% of the wildebeest, 71% of the zebras and 61% of the

buffaloes perished. More than 400 elephants died from the drought and an upsurge of poaching.

The IBs suffered greatly during this drought, losing 21 members. Most of these were calves. Sadly, their new matriarch Inga died along with Iola, Ivy, and Isiola. The losses of these adult females and all the calves were devastating for the family.

Elephants are also resilient. The next oldest female was Iona, who at the time was 39 years old and so she was old enough and experienced enough to take on the leadership. This small (for her age and for her family of tall elephants), unassuming elephant turned out to be a remarkably successful matriarch. She remains the matriarch to this day, 12 years after she took over.

The drought broke in 2010. African savannahs are remarkable in being able to recover quickly. Within a couple of months, the woodlands and plains were transformed from what looked like bare soil to lush green swards. Underneath that dusty ground the seeds and roots remain waiting for the moisture to release them.

Slowly the elephants began to recover. They put on weight and there was a spring in their step. The ATE team had their work cut out for them trying to discover who had died, who had survived, and who all the orphans were. It took almost a year to be able to figure it all out.

In the meantime, it didn't take the females long to recover enough to start breeding again. Already in January and February 2010 we recorded females in oestrus. With a 22-month gestation period we expected to start finding new calves in November 2011 and we did. There were actually two births in October, so those females were surprisingly early. More calves came in November and December: a total of 49, and then in 2012 there was a deluge of calves, another 201!

Now under the leadership of Iona, the IBs began to build up their numbers again. The first females to give birth was matriarch Iona and Isis's daughter Ivana. They actually gave birth in 2010, which meant that they had managed to carry their calves through the drought.

Remarkably both of these calves are alive today—Isobar and Icestorm. In



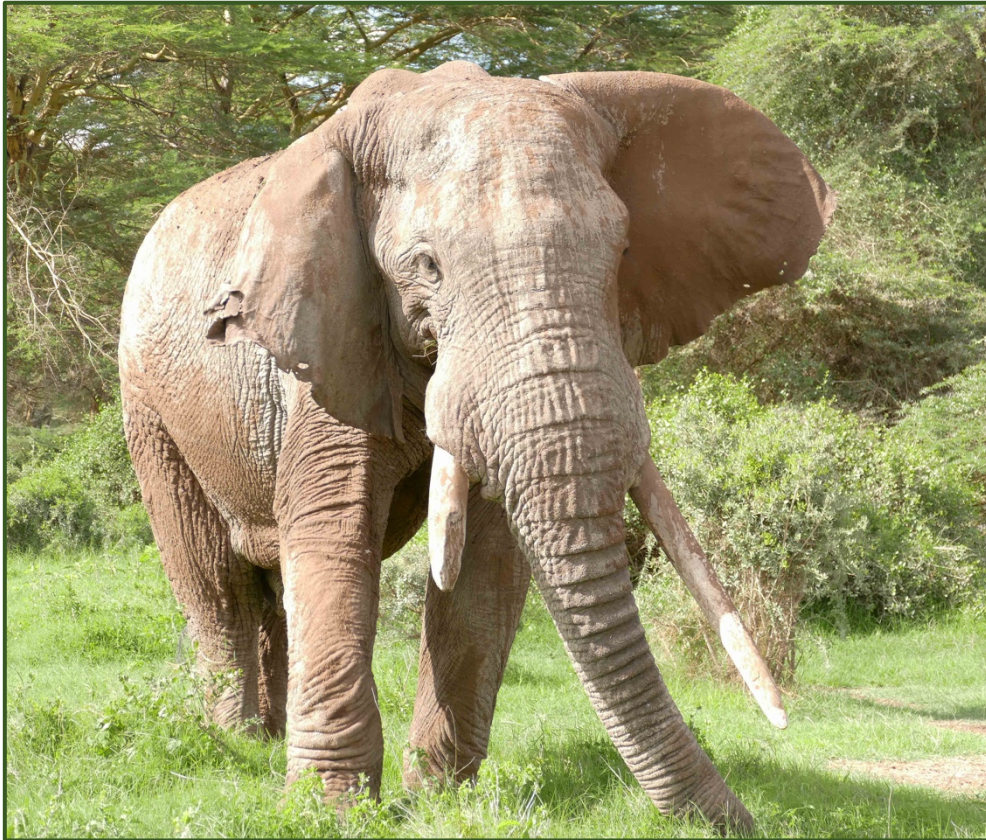
Iona in 2018; at 51 years old today, she looks much younger than her age

late 2011 there were two more births. These calves were conceived after the drought ended. Then in 2012 there was a veritable deluge of calves in the IBs. Six calves were born all of whom survive to this day. In fact, every calf born since 2010 except for one has survived. Iona was doing something right.

There was a second less severe drought in 2017, but the IBs did not lose a single individual. This drought caused an amazing baby boom. Once again, the females had stopped reproductive when they were in poor. In 2018 the rains were good, the elephants' nutritional levels improved, and the females started to cycle again. Twenty-two the most amazing birth

boom occurred. During 2020, 236 calves were born, an all-time record for Amboseli.

The IBs joined in and produced five calves. All are doing well. As I'm writing this history the IBs are one of the largest families in Amboseli with 50 members and 11 adult males out in the world of the independent bulls.



Icarus, the son of Isis, is 38 years old and active in fathering calves

They have done very well over the years thanks to the original wise leadership of Isis and under the continued direction of Iona. Remarkably, despite their numbers, we have not seen any definite splits in the family. Usually when a family becomes this large we see offshoots developing. We are fascinated to see how this family will be structured over the next years.

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Amboseli Trust for Elephants
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Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	Mother {grandmother} if dead
Iona	F	1970	?
Irata	F	Nov-17	
Irsia	M	Sep-13	
Isobar	F	Jan-10	
Isia	F	Jan-03	
ILA20	F	Mar-20	
Irio	M	Jun-14	
Imelda	F	Nov-99	
ILD18	F	Feb-18	
Ifora	F	Jun-12	
Isodora	F	Nov-79	Isis
ISO20	F	May-20	
Izembaro	M	Feb-16	
Ituri	F	Jan-12	
Inocent	F	Apr-05	
INC18	M	Jun-18	
Isabella	F	Jan-90	Isis
ISB20	M	Apr-20	
Interval	F	Jul-17	
Ikenga	F	Mar-12	
Ivana	F	Dec-94	Isis
IVA20	F	Jun-20	
Iset	F	Jun-15	
Icestorm	F	Mar-10	
Ilka	F	Mar-79	Inez
ILK20	F	May-20	
Irmguard	F	Mar-15	
Ilya	M	Dec-11	
Ipii	F	Mar-93	
Iru	M	Nov-14	
Irina	F	Dec-11	
Ida	F	Apr-23	Inga
IDA20	M	Apr-20	
Ivailo	M	May-15	
Indiki	F	Feb-12	
Icedtea	F	May-07	
ICT20	M	Mar-20	
Indigo	F	Feb-96	Inga
IDG18	M	Mar-18	
Iliki	M	Feb-14	
Idoya	F	Dec-99	Inga
Intimo	F	Oct-17	
Illyria	F	May-13	
Ilene	F	Feb-85	Ivy
ILE20	M	Oct-20	
Irri	M	Dec-16	
Igbo	M	Jan-12	

Idony	F	Jan-95	Ivy
Intrada	M	Oct-17	
Ibibo	M	Feb-12	
Independent Males	Code No.	Birthdate	Mother
Icarus	380	Apr-83	Isis
Isuka	443	Mar-87	Iola
Iten	444	May-87	Inez
Imtiaz	492	Mar-90	Ivy
Ismail	494	Jan-90	Iona
Isaiah	556	Dec-94	Inez
Issac	557	Dec-94	Iola
Indus	590	Sep-95	Ida
Ingmar	675	Dec-99	Isis
Ivor	676	Dec-99	Iola
Illiasu	777	Dec-02	Ilka