

THE HISTORY OF THE JB FAMILY

The JB family was first sighted in December 1973 by Iain Douglas-Hamilton, the pioneering elephant researcher with whom I worked in the late '60s. Iain was visiting Amboseli and knew that I was starting a study there. He took several rolls of film of elephants and handed them over to Harvey Croze and me. These photos turned out to be very useful.

Harvey and I had started the Amboseli Elephant Research Project in September 1972. We could only work very much part-time over the next three years. Our main goal was to try to identify as many individuals as possible and to work out how many families there were and who the members were.



The first photo of the JB's: (left to right) Justine, her calf, Jeanette, Jane's calf, Jane, and Juanita

In September 1975, I established a permanent camp in the Park. By this time Harvey had taken on a full time job at the UN and so I was continuing on my own. I knew most of the families but I had a way to go to complete the IDs. Going back over and over again through our photos and those that Iain took revealed several rarely seen families. One of these was a family I eventually assigned the letters JB. Iain had photographed them in 1973. It appeared to be a family of six. I gave them names starting with the letter 'J':

Justine	Adult female
6 month-old calf	F
Jane	Adult female
3-4 year-old calf	F
Jeanette	Young female – about 12 years old
Juanita	Young female – about 10 years old

I didn't see this family at all in 1974 or 1975. I found them twice in June 1976 and then not again until January 1977. From that point on I started to see them on a more regular basis but nowhere near as often as the more central families.

Sadly, by the end of 1977 I had to conclude that three members were dead: Jane and her calf and Juanita. There was still poaching in the Amboseli ecosystem during that year and I feared that they had been killed for their tusks. Fortunately, the others were spared and I noted that they formed a bond group with two other families: the BCs and the HBs. Although Justine was old enough to be a matriarch—I estimated her to be in her early 30s—it is always valuable to have the wisdom of an older matriarch like Horatia of the HBs, who was in her mid 40s.

The next years were peaceful for the JB family. There were no deaths and two calves were born. Jeanette had her first calf in December 1979, a female; and Justine gave birth to a daughter in March 1980. I was glad they had daughters because it meant that the family would grow. Daughters stay in the family for the rest of their lives while males leave at around 12-14 years old.

Over the next eight years the JB family prospered and grew. Three more calves were born: a female to Jeanette in 1984; a female to Jemima, Justine's daughter, in 1985; and a male to Justine in 1987. Jemima was the little six month old calf we first recorded in December 1973. She grew up to be very beautiful.

Calves are named according to the system I use. Usually a calf is not named until it is four years old. Then they are given a name starting with their family letter. Up until January of the year the calf will turn four it is referred to by a code based on its mother's name and its year of birth. For example, Justine's calf born in 1987 had the code JUS87. Justine and Jeanette's older calves were named Jacinta and Jasmine.

After Jane, her calf and Juanita died in 1977, there were only three members left. Now they had a healthy family of eight:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	
Justine	F	1946	
JUS87	M	Mar-87	
Jacinta	F	Mar-80	
Jemima	F	Jan-73	
JEM85	F	Feb-85	
Jeanette	F	1961	
JEA84	F	Oct-84	
Jasmine	F	Dec-79	

All was going well for the family but then tragedy struck. Justine, the matriarch was speared and killed in January 1988. We don't know what the circumstances were. Her youngest calf died at the same time. Jeanette took over as matriarch. Then in 1989 Jemima's calf died at four years old of unknown causes. Jeanette had a calf in January 1989, but he died two months later.

From 1989 to 1995 life was peaceful for the JB's. Jeanette was doing a good job of leading her family. Three more calves were born. But then in October 1995 Jeanette was speared and killed. Again, we did not know the circumstances. It seemed the JB's were using areas that were not safe. Jemima at only 22 years old took over as the leader.

Jacinta gave birth for the first time in 1995 and the following year Jasmine had her first calf. Jacinta's calf died when she was 10 months old and Jasmine's died at one year old. Losing a first calf is not unusual but it is still sad and traumatic for the mother. Jeanette's daughter, named Judy, added two calves to the family, one in 2004 and one in 2008.

Several other calves were born in those years and everything seemed to be going well for the JB's, but external conditions were against them. By the end of 2008 Amboseli was in the grip of the worst drought in living memory. In 2009 thousands of cattle, sheep, goats, zebras, wildebeest and other animals died. The elephants were not spared; almost 400 of the 1550 elephants known to the project died. The calves were the first to go. There was nothing for them to eat and their mothers could not produce enough milk for them. In 2008, 151 calves were born, which was a new record. However, the next year these calves were at the age when they needed to supplement milk with vegetation and there simply wasn't anything they could eat. As a result, 97 of them died during 2009. The calves born during 2009 also suffered but they did better because they didn't

have to eat as much vegetation. Of the 85 calves born during the drought 38 died.



The JB's were not spared. They lost four members during 2009: one adult Judy (Jeanette's 15-year-old daughter), her two calves and Jacinta's second calf born in January of that year. Other families had much greater losses. One family lost seven females. In all 60 adult females died.

Beautiful Jemima with her crossed tusks

The drought broke in December and fairly good rain fell 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. It always amazes me. 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 in the Amboseli population long to recover enough to start breeding again. Already in January and February 2010 we recorded females in oestrus. With a twenty-two month gestation period we expected to start finding new calves in November 2011. And that's exactly what happened. There were actually two births in October, so those females were surprisingly early. More calves came in November and December: a total of 50, and then in 2012 there was a deluge of calves, another 201!

Under Jemima's leadership the JB's joined in the baby boom. The first to give birth during the baby boom was Jemima who had a son in December 2011. This calf turned out to be very exciting and very



Jemima's very special calf

interesting. His coloring was

unusual. His skin was very pink and his hair at the ear openings and on his tail was blond rather than black. (The blond hair is visible in the photo.). At first, I thought he might be albino but his eyes were the normal dark amber color. With a bit of research, I discovered that animals with certain defective genes that cause less melanin to be produced are described as "leucistic". In all the years in Amboseli we had never recorded a calf like this.

One month later a second calf with the same coloring was born to a totally unrelated family—the FAs. Exactly a year later a third leucistic calf was born again to another unrelated family. Since then no others have been recorded. I suspect these three calves might have had the same father, although I don't know how the genes is passed on.

In the meantime, the JB's were making up for their losses. Jemima's daughter Jalila had her first calf in December; and Jacinta and Jasmine gave birth in 2012. Three of the males born to the family went independent as all young males do around 12-14 years old. By November 2012, the family consisted of the following:

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	Mother if Dead
Jemima	F	Jan-73	Justine
JEM11	M	Dec-11	
Julep	F	May-07	
Jolie	F	Mar-03	
Jalila	F	Jul-98	
JAL11	F	Dec-11	
Jasmine	F	Dec-79	Jeanette
JAS12	F	Jul-12	
Jaeger	M	Apr-07	
Jesse	M	Dec-99	
Jacinta	F	Mar-80	Justine
JAC12	M	May-12	
Jacqueline	F	Apr-05	
Java	M	Jan-00	
Independent Males	Code	Birth Date	Mother
Jatinder	515	Jun-91	Jeanette
Jawa	547	Jul-93	Jemima
Jabbar	647	May-98	Judy

Once again tragedy struck. Jemima was speared and killed in December 2012. It was a huge loss for the JB family. She had been their matriarch for 17 years and during that time she had kept them safe. It was an even greater loss for her youngest calf, the leucistic one with the pale hair and skin. He was only a year old and could not survive without her. Although family members will take care of an orphaned calf they are not able to provide the milk a calf still needs at that age.

We called the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust to come and rescue the calf whom we now called Jasiri, which means “brave” in Swahili. It turned out we had a problem because we couldn’t find him. We kept seeing the JB’s but not Jasiri and then three months after his mother died, he was discovered on his own looking very thin. How he survived for that long we can’t figure out. He was immediately rescued and sent to the Sheldrick orphanage in Nairobi where he has flourished. (To read more about his rescue and to see photos of him today, go to: www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/orphans/jasiri)

As an interesting side note, the second leucistic calf born in Amboseli to the FA family also ended up at the Sheldrick Trust. He is called Faraja, which means “to

be relieved from stress or pain” in Swahili. His mother Fenella disappeared when he was seven months old and he was rescued shortly after on August 21, 2012. He and Jasiri are now together at the Umani release center. They are great buddies. I think they are likely brothers with the same father. (Read more about Faraja at: www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org/orphans/faraja)

After the sad loss of Jemima and the rescue of Jasiri in 2012, life for the JB's was relatively quiet. One of the JB females didn't waste any time, and after a shorter than average calving interval, Jalila gave birth again in 2015. In 2017 there were three births. Two were first births: to Jacqueline, Jacinta's daughter; and to Jemima's daughter Jolie. The third birth was to Jasmine, a daughter born in November 2017.

Over the next two years, Amboseli received higher than average rainfall, resulting in abundant and nutritious vegetation for the wildlife. The three calves born to the JB's thrived.



Current matriarch Jasmine and her two-year-old daughter

In December 2019, Amboseli received 324mm of rain, which is our average rainfall for a whole year. It rained off and on all through January, February and

March 2020. The roads suffered terribly but the elephants were very fat and happy, as was the other wildlife.



The JB family in December 2019 walking through the lush grasses produced by the abundant rainfall; the younger females are at the front--Jolie and Julep--while two older females are at the back with the calves in between

Two more calves were born to the JBs in February, 2020. A son to first-time mother Julep and a daughter to Jalila. The family is doing well under Jasmine's leadership.

***Cynthia Moss
Amboseli National Park
March 2020***

Individual	Sex	Estimated or Known Date of Birth	Mother {grandmother} if Dead
Jasmine	F	Dec-79	Jeanette
JAS17	F	Nov-17	
Jeskwa	F	Jul-12	
Jacinta	F	Mar-80	Justine
Jakori	M	May-12	
Jacqueline	F	Apr-05	
JCQ17	M	Dec-17	
Jalila	F	Jul-98	Jemima {Justine}
JAL20	F	Feb-20	
Jadwiga	F	Mar-15	
Janicka	F	Dec-11	
Jolie	F	Mar-03	Jemima {Justine}
JLE17	F	Nov-17	
Julep	F	May-07	Jemima {Justine}
JUP20	M	Feb-20	
Independent Males	Code	Birth	Mother
Jatinder	515	Jun-91	Jeannette
Jawa	547	Jul-93	Jemima
Jabbar	647	May-98	Judy
Jesse	677	Dec-99	Jasmine
Java	720	Jan-00	Jacinta
Jaeger	906	Apr-07	Jasmine