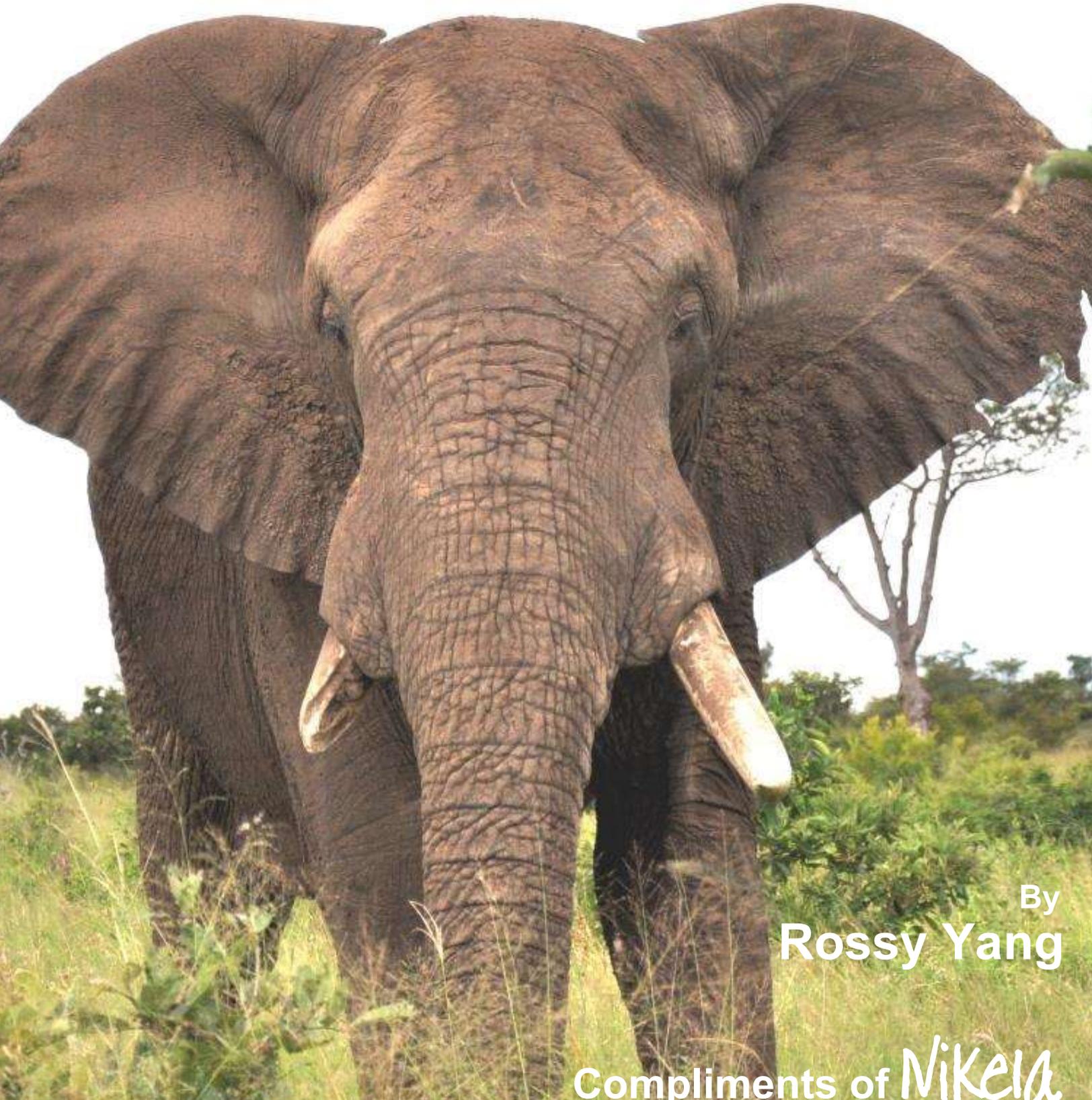


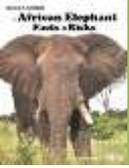
Quick Reference

The **African Elephant**  
**Facts & Risks**



By  
Rossy Yang

Compliments of *Nikela*



Hello There!

Thanks for your interest in the African Elephant.

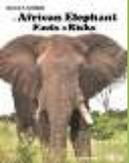
Seeing one of these magnificent creatures in the wild is truly something. They need to be respected, as they like humans less and less it seems. But then, that is not too surprising as in some parts of Africa they are being mercilessly hunted by poachers for their ivory tusks.

This Quick Reference provides some of the basic facts and risks about the African Elephant, researched and written by Nikela volunteer Rossy Yang and brought to you compliments of Nikela.

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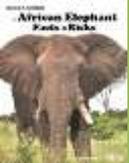
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Margrit



## Interesting Facts

The African elephants are the world's largest land mammals; they can weigh up to 6 tons, measure up to a whopping 11 feet at shoulder height, and reach up to 24 feet in length. Not only are these awe-inspiring animals remarkable because of their size, they also rank amongst the world's smartest mammals. The elephant's neocortex is similar in shape to that of a human's or a dolphin's. This area of the brain is associated with language, emotions, and other advanced behaviors. However, for some humans neither the African elephant's intelligence nor their impressive size is the major point of interest. Quite a few of these people are more interested in the mammoth descendant's great tusks. These individuals hold an interest in ivory for decorative purposes and have been hunting these gentle giants to extinction. Population decline is also influenced by humans encroaching on the elephants' territory, occupying their grazing space, and displacing them from their habitats.

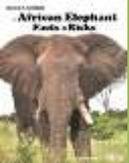


## **Distribution**

The African elephant is found throughout the continent of Africa in almost 40 of the countries there. The elephants are found in a wide variety of habitats ranging from the moist forests to the arid deserts. It is difficult to get data on the population density of African elephants because the forest and woodland areas that some elephants inhabit are hard to see into from both the aerial and terrestrial perspectives.

## **Taxonomy**

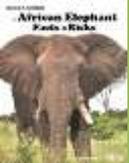
There are two definite species of the African elephant as of now. The Savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), also referred to as the Bush elephant, is the larger of the two currently recognized species. The Forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) is the darker in coloration of the two species. There are distinct differences in the skull structures of the Savanna and Forest elephants. The Forest elephant possesses a shorter, wider head befitting of its smaller structure. Furthermore, the Forest elephant has a concave forehead and the Savanna elephant doesn't. The third proposed species of the African elephant is the West African elephant. However, more research is needed before reclassification of the African elephant.



## **Appearance**

African elephants are grey in coloration and larger than their Asian kin and are easily identified by their large, Africa-shaped ears. These ears are used to help the elephants cool off in the African heat. Elephants also have long noses referred to as 'trunks'. The trunks on these fascinating animals contain almost 100,000 different muscles alone. These trunks also sport two structures similar to fingers at the end of their trunks. All African elephants have tusks on either side of their trunk. The Savanna elephants are known to have more curved tusks that point out and the Forest elephants have straighter tusks that point down.

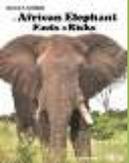




## **Diet**

The African elephant is herbivorous. When they graze, they use their trunks to grasp at the leaves of trees and shrubbery. The elephants then pull off the leaves and eat them. African elephants may damage the foliage as they graze and therefore must move frequently to find more food. Their tusks are used to strip trees of their bark or to dig up roots from the ground. The elephants are also known to eat fruits and grass.

The African elephant has a tremendous appetite, eating up to 300 pounds of food a day. However, only around 40% of the food they take in is efficiently digested.



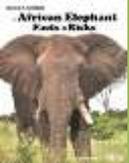
## **Behavior and Social Groups**

### ***TRAVEL***

The African elephants are intriguing in the way they travel. The elephants are constantly moving to find more food for their immense appetites. Female elephants will travel in matriarchal groups called 'herds' along with their children. The oldest female in the group is considered to be the leader of the herd. The herd will consist of the oldest female and several generations of younger females and their calves. This differs from how male elephants will usually roam solo through the lands until he finds a mate. In some cases, males can form smaller herds with other males. These smaller herds usually contain three or four members.

### ***EMOTIONS***

African elephants display remarkable emotional depth. Some of the emotions elephants exhibit are compassion, happiness, love, and grief. They are known to show compassion by taking care of weak members of their herd. They exhibit joy when witnessing the birth of a new elephant or when being



reunited with members of their family that they haven't seen since they left the herd. The elephants will pet each other with their trunks to show affection. Elephants are also seen mourning the death of other elephants. Some mourning behaviors include covering the deceased elephant's corpse with foliage, touching the bones of deceased elephants, circling the deceased's body, and stopping where a loved one has died to mourn even if it's been years since the elephant has passed away.

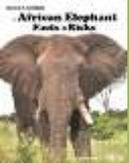
## ***MATING***

The elephants do not have a specific mating season, however when females are in estrus, they will loudly yell a mating call to draw in males from great distances. The gathered males will then engage in competition with each other, wrestling with their tusks. The females will choose the healthiest male to mate with and he will guard her during estrus. After finding a mate, the male will travel with the female's herd for a couple of weeks. After this period of time, the male will move on and continue to roam alone until he finds another mate.



## ***CALVES***

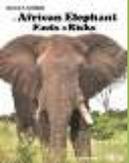
Female elephants are capable of reproducing when they are around a decade old. Gestation lasts 22 months for elephants. New born baby elephants will weigh somewhere around 200 pound and will be 3 feet in height. The young females in a herd will frequently pitch in to help the mother raise her young and act as all mothers for the young calves. Male children will travel with their mother's herd until they are matured and ready to go off and wander on their own. After maturing, male elephants will experience periods of musth. During musth, males will be more aggressive, be more sexually active, and exhibit higher testosterone levels. Hence, during musth males will likely father more offspring. Altogether, pre-, high-, and post- musth can last almost three months.



## **Conservation Status and Threats**

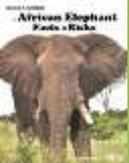
### ***STATUS***

The African elephant has been vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) since 1986 and was once put into the endangered category in 1996. Since then, the African elephant has moved back to the vulnerable classification. The African elephant is nationally extinct in The Gambia (as of 1913), Swaziland (as of 1920), Burundi (as of 1970s), and Mauritania (as of the 1980s). The African elephant was reintroduced to Swaziland in the 1980s. The World Wildlife Foundation has said that the population of the African elephant is around 700,000 as of 2014. However, the African Wildlife Foundation has estimated that roughly 470,000 African elephants still remain.



## ***THREATS***

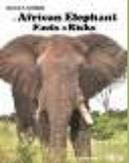
**POACHING:** One of the major threats against the survival of the African elephant is poaching. Although international ivory trade has been illegal since the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) banned it in 1989, the elephants' tusks are still very valuable due to a scarcity of supply and a large demand. Each year, almost a tenth of the African elephant population is poached for the valuable tusks found on the healthiest males and oldest females. A pound of ivory is worth \$1,500 USD on the black market. This makes the illegal ivory trade very profitable for criminal and terrorist groups. In fact, a Somalian-based branch of the terrorist group al Qaida makes over half a million USD each month from the trading of unlawful ivory. An estimated 70% of ivory is exported to China, the world's biggest ivory market. The United States follows China as the country with the second largest ivory market. Both countries have destroyed vast amounts of contraband ivory to make a statement against the illegal ivory trade.



The demand for ivory is very predominate in East Asia. In countries like China and Japan, citizens have found themselves with a need to display their wealth and status with expensive, exotic, and sometimes illegal items.

**CULTURE:** However, economic and social reasons are not the only factors in demand. There is also a cultural factor that causes the illegal ivory trade to flourish. In some East Asian countries, it was believed that ivory would change color when dipped in poison and so ivory was a choice material for chopsticks. To this day, illegal markets thrive on the borders of East Asian countries and even sometimes on the most frequented websites in East Asian countries.

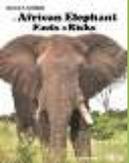
In Mong La, Burma, on the border of Burma, Laos, and China, there is a market where one can find real and fake illegal goods. This includes ivory goods. Buyers come from all over to meet the sellers and purchase cheap commodities, contraband cheap commodities. One might ask if the buyers and sellers know they are participating in something illegal. Both parties are well aware that they are participating in the unlawful distribution and acquisition of new ivory goods. This then begs the question of what is being done to shut down these kinds of markets. The answer is not a pleasant one.



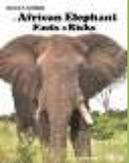
The authorities (both local and national) haven't put as much effort as they should have into stopping the traders that operate markets like these. On a national level, it is difficult to control trade that goes on so far from the capital. This is especially true if the corrupt local authorities are unwilling to lend a hand.

**INTERNET:** Recently, an Internet company in Japan by the name of 'Rakuten' has been found advertising contraband ivory goods on its website. Rakuten is one of the biggest e-commerce companies and by offering ivory commodities is causing a demand for ivory which in turn is spurring the poaching of the African Elephants. The company's Code of Ethics says that Rakuten aims to avoid engaging in "illegal or morally questionable activity," but what this company is doing is clearly against the CITES. Rakuten is being asked to take down any advertisements for ivory by Kenya's Save the Elephants.

**HABITAT LOSS:** Another major threat to the African elephant population is also caused by human beings. As humans spread across the land, we take up spaces of land that elephants originally used for grazing. Humans have quickly convert land to be used for industrial purposes,



resulting in an increase in the amount of human-elephant conflicts. Due to this upsurge in conflict, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has formed a group that works in solving human-elephant conflicts. Community operated conservation groups have also made efforts to decrease human-elephant conflicts by increasing elephant tolerance. The Bonn Convention has also launched the Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures of the African Elephant (abbreviated as MoU). The MoU's goal is to preserve elephants by protecting not only the elephants themselves, but also the lands on which they live with the collaboration of governments, scientists, and preservation groups. In an effort to preserve the elephants, many countries have implicated laws that enforce habitat management and protection of the species from hunters. However, it is estimated that 70% of the elephants live in places where these laws are not enforced. Furthermore, practices such as large-scale culling which were once used to manage local population densities have not been used since 1994. In some countries where hunting is legal, such as Botswana, Tanzania, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, CITES export quotas for elephant trophies are enforced.



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