

Huge Arch

The elephant is one of the most easily recognisable animals in the whole wide world. A gentle giant of nature, the elephant is a truly amazing creature, that without the help of conservationists, could be completely wiped out within a matter of decades. The sad truth is that their habitats are being crushed to make way for infrastructure projects, and poachers are still taking aim to at these beautiful beasts to meet the demands of the illegal ivory trade.

The word “Elephant” is actually latin for “huge Arch”. These animals certainly are huge and impressive beasts. In fact, the elephant is the largest living land mammal in the world.

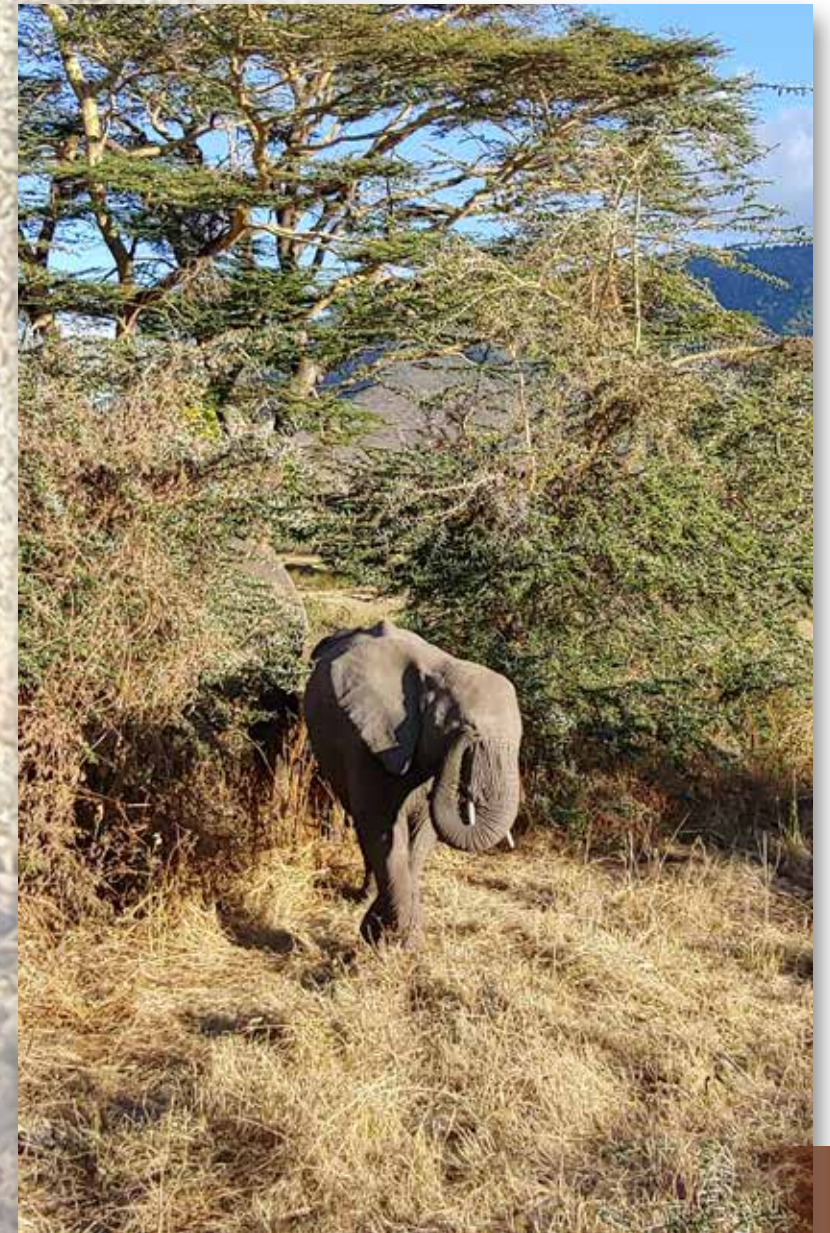
A male elephant can grow up to 4 metres in height and weigh up to 7 tonnes; whilst their females counterparts can still weigh in at a mere 3.5 tonnes.





To feed an animal of such gigantic proportions takes a lot of food. Their daily food intake is almost as much as 4-7% of their body weight. When you are an elephant, that equates to finding and eating an awful lot of food. As you would expect, all that food needs to be digested and dozed off, which is why our elephant friends can deposit upwards of 150 kg of dung daily!

Elephants are herbivores and only eat grasses, herbs, fruit, plants and trees. Their healthy, vegetarian diet is obviously good for them as the average elephant has a life span of around 70 odd years, a bit like we do.





Despite their size, they are actually pretty nimble and can walk up to 195 km per day, although their average is only 25 km on a daily basis. They can also run faster than you would expect, easily reaching speeds of 40 mph, which is a lot faster than us humans can run.

Elephants are gentle, intelligent creatures that must be protected to ensure that they remain part of our natural ecosystem for centuries to come.

Elephants are social animals who tend to live in large groups. They are known for their ability to stay within “family” groups for the duration of their lives, and never stray far from their own mothers.



It is definitely a case of “girl power” in the elephant world as the females and their young live in breeding herds, whilst the males are often cast aside.



There is usually one leader, the matriarch, who is often the oldest female, with the rest of the herd being made up of her own offspring. Being the oldest, she has the experience and knowledge that will ensure the survival of the herd in times of hardship. She will take them to water and food beyond their usual range, and teach them how to protect themselves from danger.



Young females will usually stay with the herd, whilst the males leave the herd during adolescence (between the ages of 10 and 19 years) to lead the life of a more solitary bull elephant.



Bull elephants are also known as “bachelors” and often seen with other male elephants to form small groups of their own. Family life is definitely all about mums and their babies, although the male elephants are usually not too far away, keeping an eye on their offspring.

Elephants are highly intelligent, social animals that use a variety of different means to communicate with each other. Like humans, they love to talk to each other by vocalising a range of calls and sounds. Research shows that as many as 70 different calls have already been identified, ranging from the loud trumpets of panic to the comforting rumbles of reassurance. They also use infrasound (sounds that are at a frequency inaudible to humans) calls which can be heard up to 14km away.



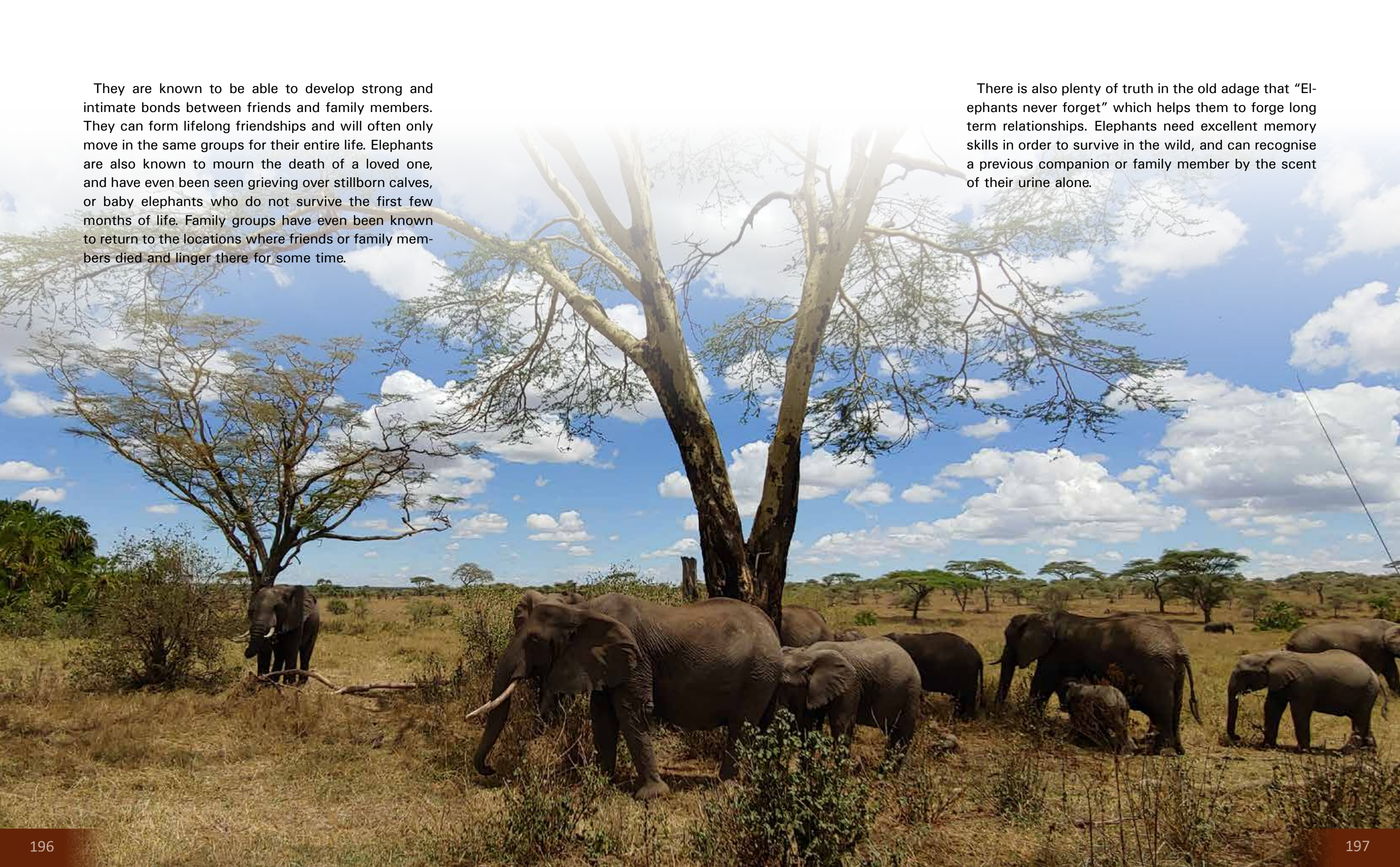
Recent evidence also suggests that they may also be able to communicate through seismic waves that pass through the ground, which they pick up through their sensitive feet.

Rumour has it that elephants mate for life. Whilst this is not necessarily true, animal scientist have proven that they will never stray far from mating partners.



They are known to be able to develop strong and intimate bonds between friends and family members. They can form lifelong friendships and will often only move in the same groups for their entire life. Elephants are also known to mourn the death of a loved one, and have even been seen grieving over stillborn calves, or baby elephants who do not survive the first few months of life. Family groups have even been known to return to the locations where friends or family members died and linger there for some time.

There is also plenty of truth in the old adage that “Elephants never forget” which helps them to forge long term relationships. Elephants need excellent memory skills in order to survive in the wild, and can recognise a previous companion or family member by the scent of their urine alone.



So, whilst elephants may not quite be as romantic as we like to think they are, there is certainly a lot of evidence that they do form strong bonds with their own social networks. Elephants can live for up to 70 years in the wild, so being part of a group is important to them.

