

Copycat Elephants

by Michael Thai

What do elephants and parrots have in common?

- 1 You may have seen a talking parrot on a TV show, in a movie, or even in someone's home. The parrot has learned to copy sounds that people make. Birds are not the only animals that can copy the noises they hear. Dolphins, bats, and some apes also mimic sounds. Now we can add elephants to this list of copycats.
- 2 Dr. Joyce H. Poole is a zoologist. She studies the sounds of elephants. While she was in Kenya, she would hear strange noises made by Mlaika after sunset. Mlaika was a 10-year-old African elephant.
- 3 Mlaika lived near a highway. Dr. Poole says, "I could not tell the difference between Mlaika's call and the distant truck noise." She and other scientists studied Mlaika's sounds. It turned out that Mlaika was copying the sounds of the trucks driving by.

Chirping Elephants

- 4 "Mlaika was not the only copycat elephant," Dr. Poole says. Calimero is a 23-year-old male African elephant. He spent 18 years with two female Asian elephants. Asian elephants make chirping sounds to talk with one another. African elephants usually do not make chirping sounds. But Calimero now does. He is copying his Asian elephant friends.
- 5 Only a few other mammals, such as bats, dolphins, and humans, have learned to copy noises around them. Many of them seem to copy the sounds of friends to create a special bond.
- 6 Dr. Poole says that elephants, too, need to form bonds with their family and friends. She says, "They make sounds to communicate with each other. When they are separated, they use sound to keep in contact."

What is a mammal?

A mammal is an animal that has hair on its body and makes milk to feed its young.

- 7 Why would Mlaika copy trucks that she heard going by on the highway? Animals that are able to mimic sounds may enjoy practicing new sounds. When they are kept outside of their natural environment, they may copy unusual sounds. That may be why an elephant would copy the sound of a truck.
- 8 Parrots, dolphins, humans, and elephants show that being a copycat is one way that animals and people make new friends and keep old ones.

Which detail best supports the article's main idea?

- A** Parrots copy human sounds.
- B** People copy sounds and noises.
- C** Mlaika is one of the elephants that copy sounds.
- D** Dr. Joyce H. Poole studies mammals that copy sounds.