

Endangered Species: The African elephant

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Word Count **551**

Level **530L**



Image 1. An African elephant in South Africa's Kruger National Park. The African elephant is the world's largest land animal. Photo by: Frédéric Soltan/Corbis via Getty Images.

The African elephant is the world's largest living land animal. An average male stands more than 10 feet tall. It weighs between 11,000 and 14,000 pounds. That is as much as several cars! A female African elephant is a little shorter. It weighs between 8,000 and 10,000 pounds.

The animal's thick, loose skin is dark gray. It has long white tusks. These are actually teeth. The African elephant has a long lifespan. It can live up to 70 years.

Apart from its tusks, the African elephant has another special feature: its trunk. The elephant's trunk grows out of its nose and upper lip. The animal uses it for many things. It uses it to drink, smell, breathe and feel. The elephant also uses its trunk to communicate. It can use the trunk to greet and signal to other elephants.

African elephants are herbivores. That means they mainly eat plants. They munch on tree bark, leaves, fruits and grasses. The elephants eat about 300 to 400 pounds of food a day! They drink about 50 gallons of water. African elephants are never far from a source of water. They use it for drinking, bathing and cooling.

Elephants are social animals. They like to be around each other. Family units are made up of females and their young. These groups are known as herds. The entire herd is led by an older female. She is called the matriarch. All of the other members of the herd are related to her.

Older male elephants may live by themselves. Or, they may live with other males in small groups. They meet up with females only to mate. A female gives birth to a single calf at a time. The baby lives closely with its mother for several years.

Habitat

African elephants cover a huge territory. They are found in most areas of Africa south of the Sahara Desert. Some live in forest areas. Others live in grasslands.

There are about 500,000 elephants in Africa today. This may sound like a big number. But the elephant population is much smaller than it used to be. There were once as many as 3 to 5 million elephants in Africa.

History And Conservation

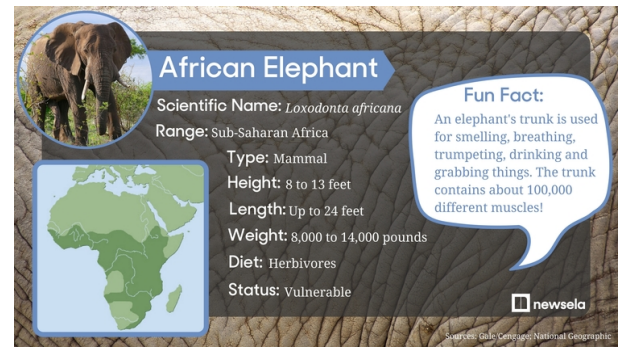
African elephants face several dangers today. One is loss of land. People are building on the land where elephants like to live. This pushes the animals out.

Another threat is poaching, or illegal hunting. For many years people have hunted African elephants for their tusks. Tusks are made of ivory. This material has been used to make many things, from jewelry to piano keys. Today, it is against the law to sell ivory. That is because of an agreement between many countries.

They knew the sale of ivory was putting elephants at risk. So they came together to stop it.

Several African countries have taken steps to protect elephants. They have set aside land for the animals. These protected areas are called reserves. Tourists like to visit these places. They can see elephants in their natural setting.

Many efforts to protect elephants have been successful. However, poaching is still a problem. The African elephant is still at risk today.



Quiz

1 The article states that elephants are social animals.

How does being a social animal help elephants survive?

- (A) The family units can help protect the young.
- (B) More food will be needed to feed the herd.
- (C) Elephants living alone can outrun predators.
- (D) A female gives birth to one baby at a time.

2 Finish the sentence below.

One MAIN idea of the article is that:

- (A) There are fewer African elephants today than in the past.
- (B) African elephants can weigh as much as several cars.
- (C) There are African elephants that live to be 70 years old.
- (D) African elephants eat 300 to 400 pounds of food a day.

3 Elephants in a herd will be different from each other.

Based on information in the article, what is an example of how the elephants would be different?

- (A) Some elephants will have a trunk and some will not.
- (B) Some elephants will be larger than other elephants.
- (C) Some elephants will eat plants and others will eat animals.
- (D) Some elephants will be dark gray and others will be brown.

4 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *People are building on the land where elephants like to live.*
2. *For many years people have hunted African elephants for their tusks.*
3. *However, poaching is still a problem.*

What MAIN idea do these details support?

- (A) Tusks are used to make piano keys.
- (B) African elephants face many dangers.
- (C) The preserves help African elephants.
- (D) People like to see African elephants.

5 Which of these animals has the most in common with elephants?

- (A) Sea turtles lay more than 100 eggs in the sand. The mother does not stay with the babies.
- (B) Gray wolves give birth to 5 to 7 puppies at a time. The babies stay with the mother for 1 or 2 years.
- (C) Mallard ducks lay around 12 eggs in a nest. After they hatch, the babies stay with the mother for 2 months.
- (D) Blue whales give birth to one whale at a time. The baby stays with the mother over a year.

- 6 Look at Image 3.
- Based on the image, what do elephants use to get their food?
- (A) tusks
 - (B) lips
 - (C) trunks
 - (D) ears
- 7 Some African elephants never grow tusks. They now live longer than elephants with tusks.
- Why would tuskless elephants live longer?
- (A) Tuskless elephants are the matriarch females.
 - (B) Hunters would not kill elephants without tusks.
 - (C) It is easier for tuskless elephants to eat grasses.
 - (D) Elephants with tusks cannot communicate.
- 8 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-6].
- What does Image 2 in that section show about African elephants?
- (A) how fast they are
 - (B) what they do for fun
 - (C) how many are left
 - (D) how big they are