

LEVELED BOOK • N

Elephants



Written by Kira Freed

Elephants



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This elephant mom and her baby live in Africa.



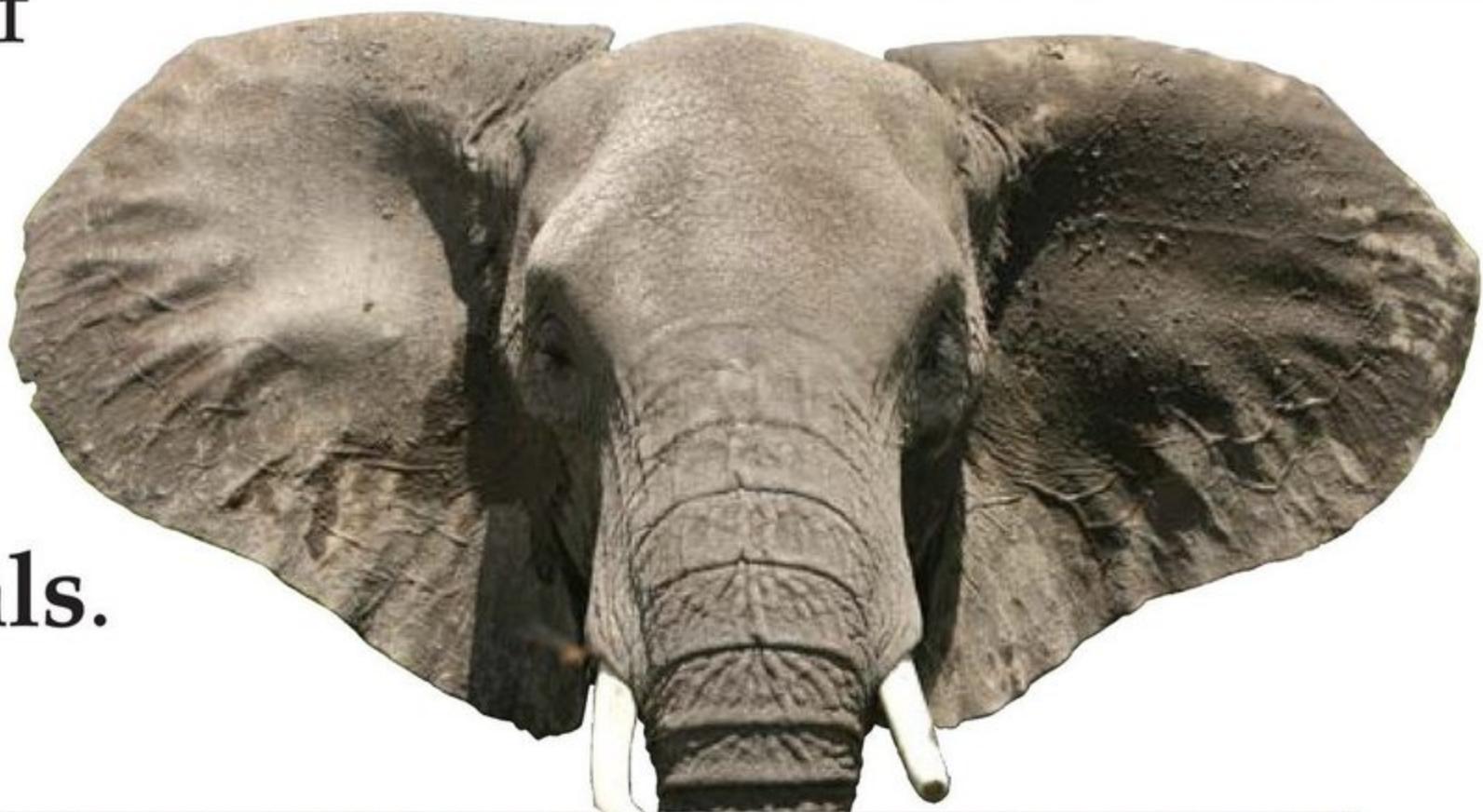
This elephant mom and her baby live in Asia.

The Largest Land Animal

Did you know that elephants are the largest land animals in the world? I saw an amazing picture of a mother elephant with her baby. I wanted to learn more about elephants, so I checked out a book from the library. I learned many unusual facts about elephants that I can share with you.

Elephant Bodies

If you've ever seen an elephant in a zoo, you know they are huge. An adult male can weigh as much as six cars. I definitely don't want an elephant to sit on me! Elephants have heavy gray bodies, thick legs, wrinkled skin, and floppy ears. Many elephants also have a pair of tusks, which are long, pointed teeth. Elephants use their tusks to peel the bark off trees and to dig for minerals.



Do You Know?

Elephants have the largest ears of any animal. They use their ears to hear, swat insects, cool off, and show their feelings.

One really interesting part of an elephant is its long trunk. An elephant's trunk is its nose and upper lip joined together into a special shape. An elephant can use its trunk like a hand to pick up food or other objects. The trunk works like a hose when an elephant drinks water or gives itself a shower.

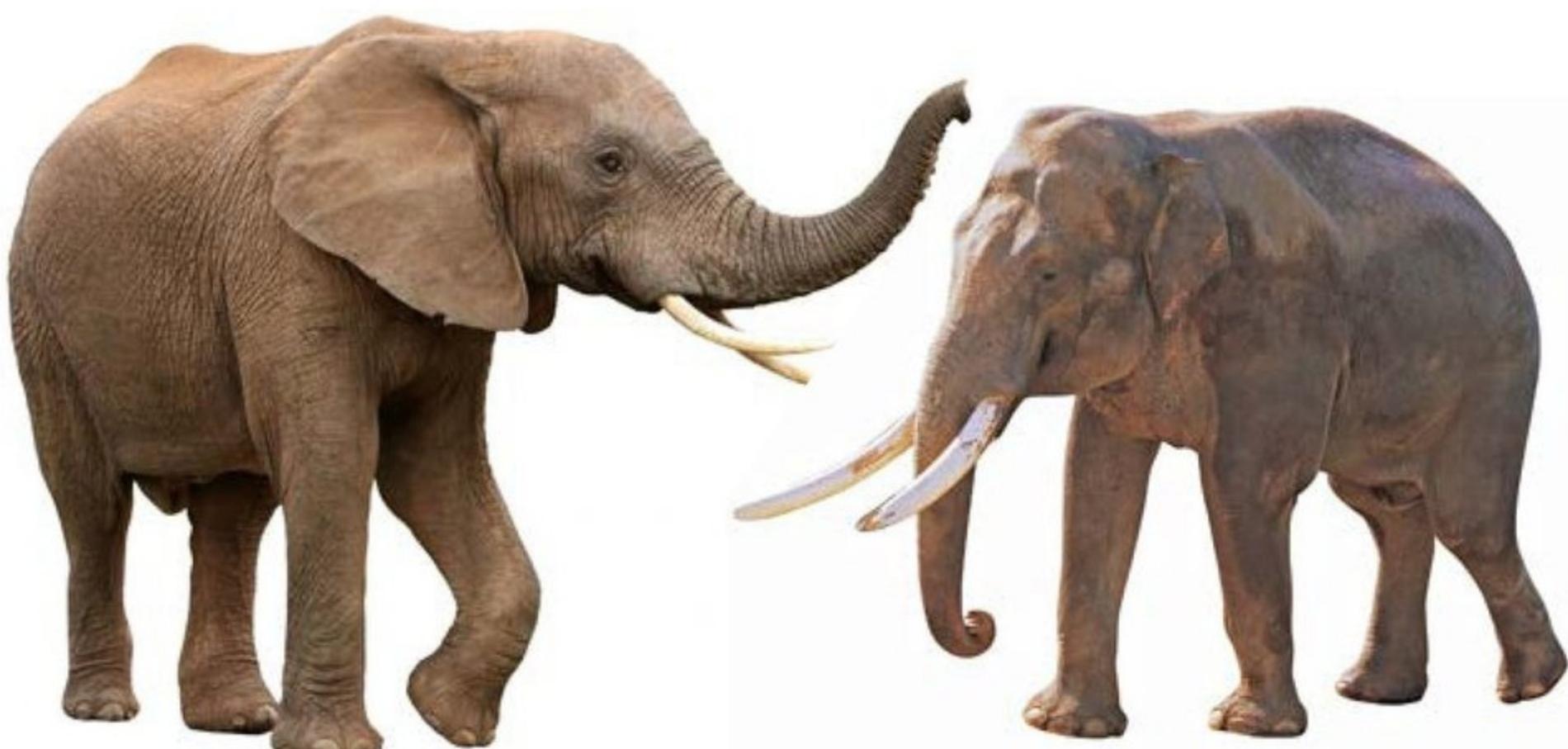
A trunk can even work like a **snorkel**, helping an elephant breathe underwater.



Do You Know?

An elephant's trunk has no bones, but it has thousands of muscles. An elephant can lift a tree or pick a flower with its trunk.

I read about two kinds of elephants. One kind lives in Africa, and the other kind lives in Asia. Here's what I learned about their differences.



African Elephants	Asian Elephants
bigger	smaller
thinner body	rounder body
big ears that cover shoulders	smaller ears that do not cover shoulders
trunk has two "fingers"	trunk has one "finger"
long tusks	short tusks; some females have no tusks
most live on grasslands	live in forests



The matriarch of this family of African elephants will teach the young ones where to find food and water.

Elephant Families

Elephants live in families of four to ten females and their young. The females, called cows, are all relatives—grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and daughters. A wise old female called the **matriarch** (MAY-tree-ark) is the leader of the family. She helps her family find food and water. She also keeps the family together and helps everyone stay safe.

Male elephants stay with their mothers until they are about 11 years old—teenagers, in elephant years. Then they go to live with other males. Adult males, called bulls, often live alone except when they **mate** with females. Sometimes bulls use their tusks to fight each other for a female.



These male elephants are fighting.



Baby elephants, called calves, are incredibly cute! When a calf is born, everyone in the family strokes it with his or her trunk to welcome it. All the adults help care for the calves. If a calf gets stuck in the mud at a **water hole**, everyone helps pull it out. If a lion is near, the adults stand in a circle around all the calves to protect them.

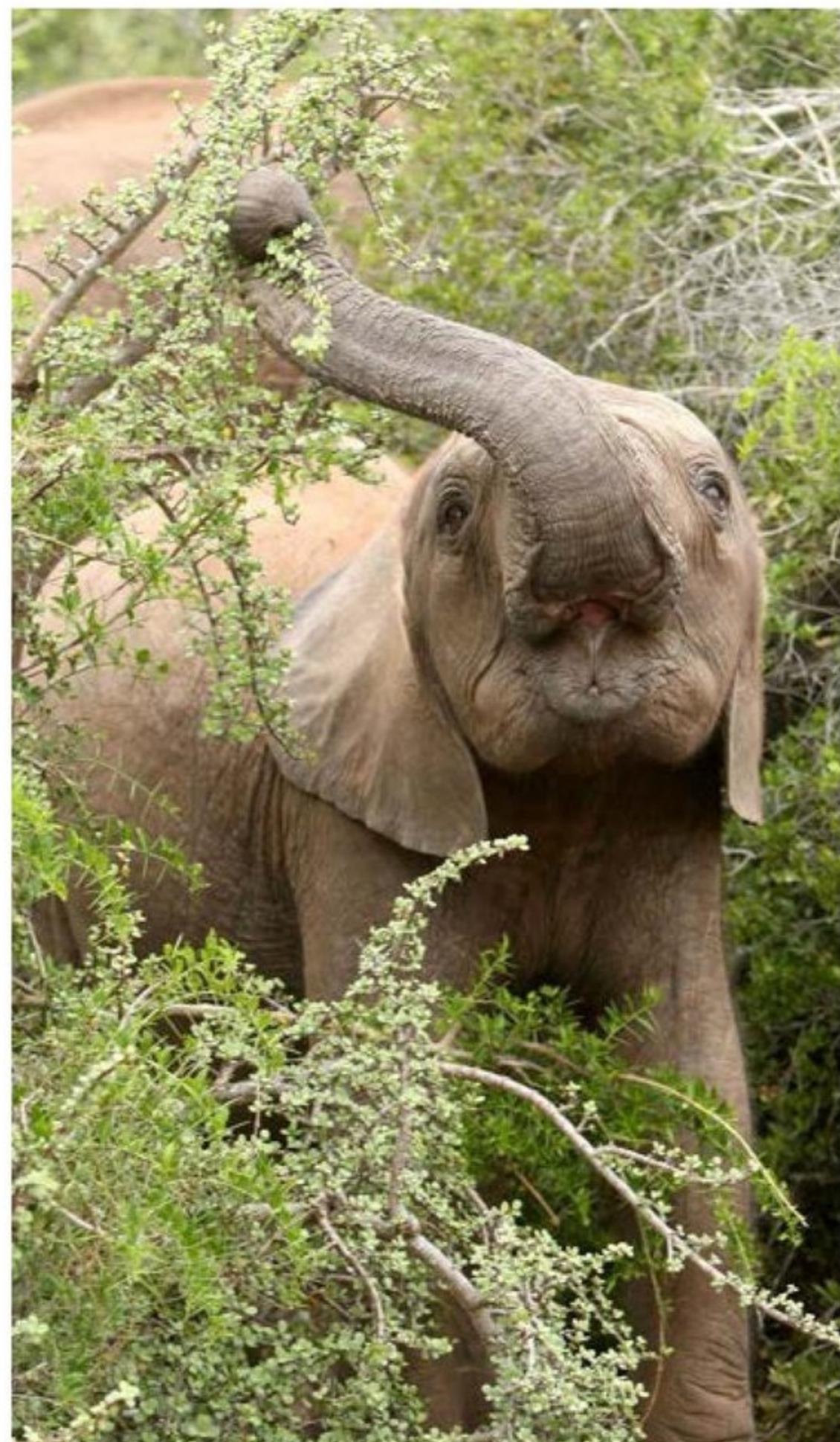


Do You Know?

Baby elephants suck their trunks for comfort, just as young children sometimes suck their thumbs.

Food and Water

Elephants are **herbivores** (UR-beh-vores), or plant eaters, and they like many kinds of food. They eat grass, leaves, bark, branches, fruit, flowers, and seeds. Elephants are always on the move, looking for food and water. They eat so much that they can't stay in one place for very long. When they leave an area, the plants have time to grow back.



This elephant uses its trunk to get food high in a tree.

Sometimes three or more families of elephants join together to form a herd. A herd may travel together to look for food and water.

Elephants often walk in single file with each family following its matriarch. They follow the same **routes** year after year as they move from place to place.

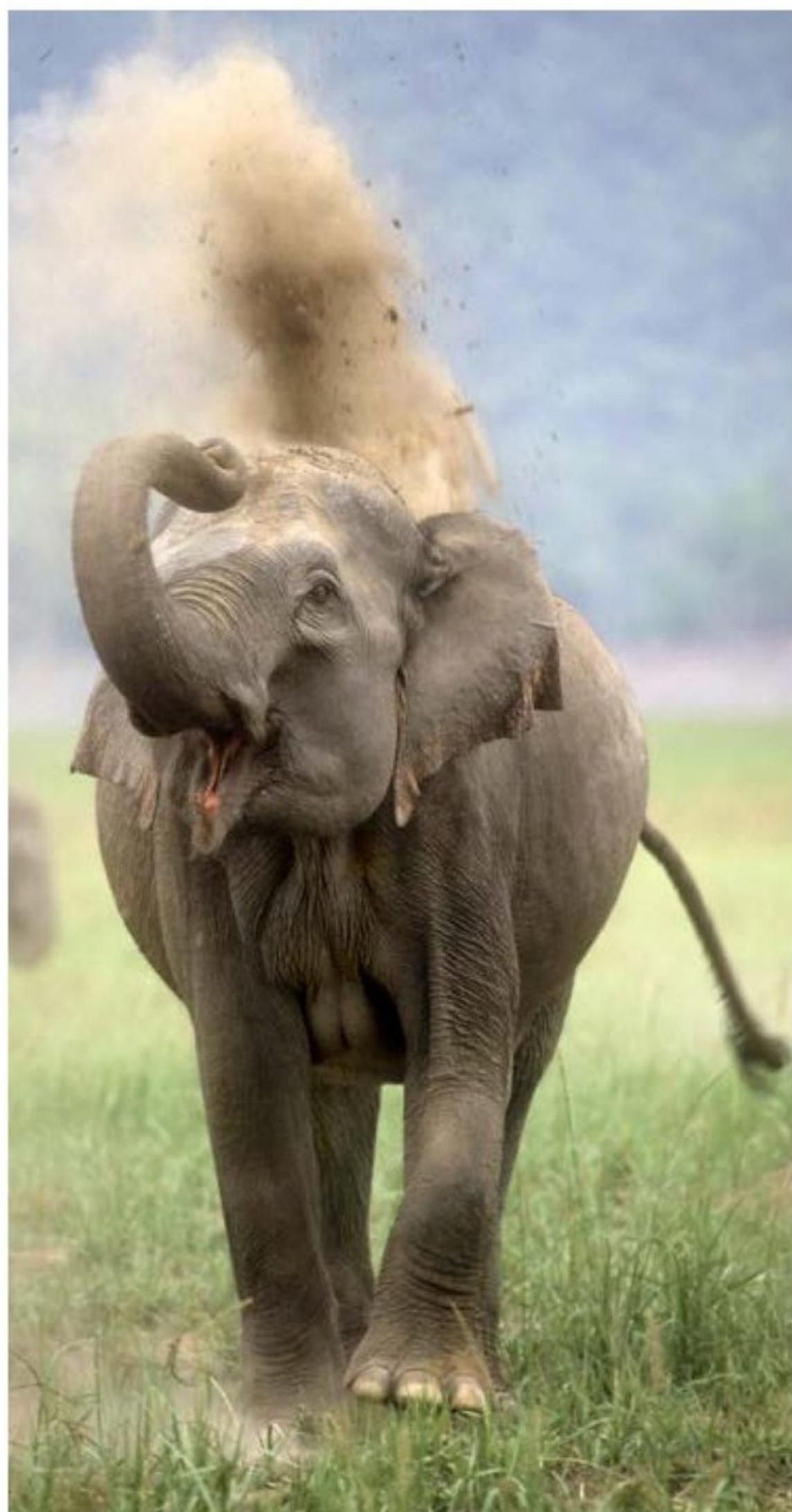


These elephants walk in single file as they move to a new area.

Elephants need to drink water, just like people. Because they live in hot places, they also need water to cool off. Elephants like to give themselves showers. They also like to roll in mud or cover themselves with dust.

Elephant skin may look tough, but it's really very sensitive.

Mud and dust help protect an elephant's skin from insect bites and the Sun's heat.



This elephant is giving itself a dust shower.



These tusks were taken away from people who broke the law and killed elephants.



This illegal art was made from an elephant tusk.

Keeping Elephants Alive

I was sad to learn that both kinds of elephants are **endangered**. Even though it is against the law, people kill elephants for their tusks. The tusks are made of ivory, which people use to make jewelry and pieces of art. People also change a lot of wild land into farms, which leaves some elephants with no place to live.

Many people around the world are trying to save elephants. Some countries have created special parks to protect elephants. Hunters are less likely to kill elephants that live in the parks than ones that live in the wild.

Elephants are amazing animals. I hope people can help these gentle giants stay alive for a very long time.



An elephant places its trunk on another elephant's forehead as a sign of friendship.

Glossary

endangered <i>(adj.)</i>	in danger of dying out completely (p. 14)
herbivores (<i>n.</i>)	animals that eat only plants (p. 11)
mate (<i>v.</i>)	to come together to make a baby (p. 9)
matriarch (<i>n.</i>)	the female in charge of a family group (p. 8)
minerals (<i>n.</i>)	nonliving substances that an animal body cannot make but needs in small amounts (p. 5)
routes (<i>n.</i>)	paths or roads (p. 12)
snorkel (<i>n.</i>)	a tube that helps a person breathe underwater (p. 6)
water hole (<i>n.</i>)	a low place outside that holds water when it rains (p. 10)

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