African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*)

**Conservation Status:** Vulnerable

African elephants arethe largest land animals on earth. The trunk, a muscular extension of the upper lip and nose, contains the nostrils and has two opposing extensions at its end that are used for communication and handling objects including food. African elephants have huge ears, up to 2 x 1.5 m, which allow them to radiate excess heat. Both males and females have tusks—large, modified incisors that continuously grow throughout an elephant’s lifetime. Their skin is gray to brownish, wrinkled, and nearly hairless. Females are known as cows while males are known as bulls.

**Fun Facts**

1. African elephants use sounds well below the range of human hearing to communicate over long distances.
2. The skull of the African elephant makes up 25% of its body weight.

**Habitat**

African elephants live in almost any habitat that offers food and water.

**Diet**

African elephants mainly eat leaves and branches of bushes and trees, but they also eat grasses, fruit, and bark.

**Predators**

Humans, lions

**Behavior**

African elephants have a complex social structure that takes the form of a matriarchal clan society. The basic social unit consists of a mother and her dependent offspring and grown daughters with their offspring. Each cow herd is typically made up of 9 to 11 elephants. Larger herds will often split into two or three units, but will remain within a mile of each other and communicate through rumbling calls so low in frequency they cannot be heard by humans. The matriarch sets the herd’s direction and pace, and the rest of the herd follows. When threatened, elephants will group around young calves. Males leave the cow herds at puberty at around 12 years of age. They live alone or in bachelor herds and are only seen near cow herds during the mating season. African elephants are not territorial, so male mating success depends largely on body size and tusk size.

**Breeding**

African elephants give birth to one calf after a gestation period of 22 months. There is a four- to nine-year interval between calves. Bulls start to compete for females around 25, but bulls over 35 typically monopolize matings. The onset of *musth*, a state of heightened aggression and sexual activity, attracts cows in heat.

**Size**

Length: 6.8-7.5 m

Height:2.5-3.3 m

**Weight**

3,000-6,000 kg

**Life Span:** 60-70 years

**Gestation Period:** 22 months

**Average number of offspring:** 1