

Elephants

By: Kirsti Appleby



Table of Contents

Types of Elephants	3-4
Diet and Eating Habits	6
Elephant Habitats	8
Behavior	10
Population	12
Lifespan	13
Glossary	14
References	15
Common Core Standards	16

Types of Elephants

Once, long ago, there were many different **species** of elephant. Today, there are only two: African and Asian.

The African elephant is the larger of the two with elephants weighing up to eight tons! That's a big elephant. Distinguishing characteristics of this species are large ears, a massive body, and a long trunk. All African elephants have tusks and their ears resemble the shape of the continent of Africa.



The Asian elephant is much smaller than the African elephant, weighing only up to five tons for the males, and only three tons, or 6,000 pounds, for the females.

Their ears are also straight at the bottom, compared to their African cousins. And only some male Asian elephants have tusks, not all, like the African elephants.



Two Asian elephant calves playing.



A group of African elephants, both adult and calf

Diet and Sleeping Habits

An elephant's diet consists mostly of grass, leaves, bamboo, bark and roots. They are also known to eat crops like bananas and sugarcane. And because of their size, adult elephants consume 300-400 pounds of food per day!

Because they have to eat so much food in a single day, they don't sleep all that much. They spend the majority of their days roaming over great distances, **foraging** for food to **sustain** their massive bodies.



Elephant Habitats

An elephant's natural habitat varies, as they can survive off of a variety of food. An assumption most people have about where elephants live is that they only live in grasslands. Though this isn't wrong, as it is one of their main habitats, they also live in the desert of the Savannah, forest areas where swamps can be found, and nearly everything else in between.

Elephants love playing and bathing in water, so they are almost always near some, but they don't mind traveling great distances in order to get to water.

However, habitat loss is a major threat facing elephants today. Climate change, human population conflicts, and **poaching** are other threats facing the elephant populations around the world.



Behavior

Led by a **matriarch**, elephants are organized into complex structures of females and calves, while the males often live in isolation. Females have one calf every four to five years after a 22-month-long **gestation** –the longest of any mammal. These calves are cared for not only by their mothers but also by the other females in the group. So, baby calves are raised by mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, etc. These calves, when born, are already 200 pounds and around three feet tall!



Elephants are family oriented and travel in groups known as **herds**.



Population & Survival

Elephants are facing more and more problems in regards to population sizes. The only **predator** they have are humans who continue to hunt them for their ivory tusks and continue to destroy the elephants' natural habitat. Because of this most elephants are put into sanctuaries and in protected parks. Elephants have survived as long as they have is because all they really need is room to roam and adequate food supplies.

At the turn of the 20th century, there were a few million African elephants and about 100,000 Asian elephants. Today those numbers have dropped. African elephant populations are between 450,000 and 700,000 and Asian elephant populations are between 35,000 and 40,000

Lifespan

The average **lifespan** for elephants is around 60 years, but due to poaching, some elephants don't live very long. Not surprisingly, wild elephants live longer than those that are born and raised in zoos.



Glossary

Species: A group of similar living things that are capable of reproducing.

Foraging: To search widely for food.

Sustain: Strengthen or support physically or mentally.

Poaching: To take game illegally.

Matriarch: The female head of a family or tribal line.

Gestation: A period of development before birth.

Herd: A number of animals living, feeding, or traveling together.

Predator: any living thing that preys on other living thing.

Lifespan: The length of time any living thing can live.

References

- Defenders of Wildlife. (2016). *Basic Facts About Elephants*. Retrieved from Defenders of Wildlife: <http://www.defenders.org/elephant/basic-facts>
- Elephant-World. (2014). *Elephant Habitat*. Retrieved from Elephant-World: <http://www.elephant-world.com/elephant-habitat/>
- National Geographic News Staff. (1996-Present). *Wild Elephants Live Longer than their Zoo Counterparts*. Retrieved from National Geographic News: http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/12/081211-zoo-elephants_2.html
- National Geographic Staff. (2016). *Asian Elephant*. Retrieved from National Geographic: <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/asian-elephant/>
- World Wildlife Fund. (2016). *Elephant Overview*. Retrieved from WWF: <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/elephant>

All pictures are public domain from Wikipedia

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

This e-book and any prints are released under a [CC BY 3.0 license](#) by the author.

This means that you are free to share, remix, transform, and build upon this book as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author.

Included works (e.g., images and other media) may have separate licensing requirements, and this release does not supersede or replace those requirements.

This e-book template is provided under a CC BY 3.0 license by the University of Idaho College of Education. If you use, share, remix, or transform this template, you should include this page at the end of your book.