












### **About elephants ...**

-  Males (bulls) can weigh up to 6 000 kg and stand up to 4m at the shoulder. They can weigh almost 2 times more than females.
-  An older female (matriarch) leads the family, which includes her sisters, daughters and their young.
-  The females push males out of the herds at puberty, around 14 years old. They may then join bachelor herds and mature later, often only breeding after 30 years of age.
-  Cows usually produce their first calf around 11 or 12 years of age. Pregnancy lasts approx. 22 months. Calves require milk until the age of 2, but most suckle until the birth of the next calf, usually 3 to 4 years.
-  Elephants only have 4 teeth, one in each side of the upper and lower jaw. They grow 6 new sets throughout their lifetime.
-  Elephants "talk" to each other using a wide variety of sounds, including low frequency rumbles that we can't hear but which can travel up to 5 to 10km!
-  Elephants eat grass, herbs, bark, fruit and leaves. Adult bulls eat approx. 250kg daily, but digest only 40% of their food. Cows eat less than bulls.
-  Elephants like to drink daily, although they can go up to 3 days without drinking. An adult male drinks up to 160 litres of water a day.

### **Elephants help us ...**

-  In the dry season, they dig holes ("gorras") to find water, which other wildlife, livestock and people can also use.
-  They also reduce bush cover and increase grass cover – of great importance to livestock farmers.
-  Elephants help the dispersal of trees by spreading seeds in their dung. They are essential to the health of our habitats.



This brochure was produced by the Hoanib River Catchment Study (a SIDA funded project) in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET).

For further information, please contact one of the above.

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# Desert-dwelling Elephants of the Northwest



*Tourist Information Pamphlet*



Ministry of Environment  
and Tourism

## **Namibia's "desert" elephants are special because...**

They are one of only two groups of desert-dwelling elephants in the world (the other is in Mali, North Africa). They have adapted to their dry and often sandy home by having a smaller body mass and larger feet than most other elephants.

Eighty years ago, more than 3 000 elephants seasonally lived in Namibia's Kunene Region, mostly in the ephemeral rivers. Hunters and poachers killed most of them by the early 1980's. Over the past 20 years, MET, NGOs and Community Game Guards have protected them, so approximately 600 elephants roam the region today.

## **The food elephants eat ...**

Because of elephants' large size and dietary needs, their diet is varied, and they eat most green vegetation. Their diet also changes from wet to dry season. In the wet season elephants prefer green grass and the tips of sprouting trees. However, during the dry season when these are not available, elephants favour:

- ✿ *Commiphora* species,
- ✿ *Faidherbia albida* (Ana) trees & seedpods
- ✿ *Colophospermum mopane* (Mopane)
- ✿ Elephants rarely eat dry grass, as they prefer the bark and roots of trees.



## **For your safety ...**

### **Respect our wild desert elephants – they deserve it!**

Remember that elephants have mediocre eyesight, good hearing and excellent smell. And they can move FAST! They can accelerate from 0 to 40km/h within seconds. Observe the following guidelines whenever elephants may be around:

#### ● **STAY IN YOUR VEHICLE AND BE QUIET.**

- Stay downwind and view elephants from a distance of at least 100 metres to leave both yourself and the elephant/s ample space to prevent confrontation.
- If they start to turn or move away, do not follow or chase them.
- **It is dangerous** to drive or walk around, especially at night or in dense vegetation.
- Elephants may charge if agitated. Often they warn you by sharply shaking their head at you. Breeding bulls in "musth" are especially unpredictable and aggressive. Sometimes a loud, sharp sound may deter them. But it is best to **"Be safe, not sorry"**.
- If elephants appear nervous or agitated by your presence, **leave!**
- Activated car alarms have been known to aggravate elephants.

## **Guidelines for Namibia's ephemeral rivers ...**

- 🐘 These are mostly wild areas where local communities live off the land with wildlife as neighbours. Help them benefit from tourism – i.e. take a local guide with you. They know the area and will bring their own equipment and food.
- 🐘 Camp in designated areas and pay the requested fees to support local communities. Stay on the marked routes to protect the habitat you have come here to enjoy.
- 🐘 If you bring it in, take it out. Leave only footprints, take only photos.
- 🐘 You may see radio collars on some elephants as they are part of a long-term research project monitoring their movements, herd composition, birth and death rates. By observing these guidelines and not disturbing the elephants, you can help the project. Your local guide will show you how to complete observation forms.

## **People and Elephants**

Roughly two-thirds of Namibia's wildlife is found outside the borders of protected areas and in direct contact with rural communities and commercial farmers. In the Kunene Region, which has a rich diversity of wildlife, approximately 60 000 people live in close association with these wild animals.

Historically, these communities have paid an economic cost in terms of social and economic development by forgoing other forms of land use in preference to wildlife. However, with the emergence of communal conservancies and their developing resource management programmes, including sustainable wildlife use (both consumptive and non-consumptive), people who live with wildlife can now directly benefit from this natural resource, as well as from tourism.