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## Recent Correspondence

Elephant Editors

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## RECENT CORRESPONDENCE

The following are responses to Elephant Newsletter No. 2, sent to the editor by Elephant Interest Group members. Writings are released by permission.

October 30, 1978

Dear Hezy,

Thank you very much for the "news letters" which I received yesterday, along with your letter.

I found Newsletter 2 very interesting. However, there are a few friendly comments I would like to make:

- (1) On page 21, it is stated that an elephant consumes 83-140 liters of water per day. I have made some observations and found that an adult bull can consume up to 300 liters of water at one time. However, I think that this was abnormal, because it appeared as if the bulls under discussion had traveled quite a long way, probably 50 km.
- (2) On page 27, mention is made of the reasoning powers of elephants. To this end, I would like to relate what happened at a waterhole: I was watching a herd drinking (time almost sunset). The wind changed and the herd got my scent. They moved off into the bush. Meanwhile, a particularly large bull whom I knew came to investigate. In fact, he came up to three meters from our truck, and then moved off in the opposite direction the herd took. The next morning we followed his spoor to see what happened. We found that he moved away for about 5 km., returned, and came back to the precise place where our truck stood, approaching from the downwind side.

From the spoor, my Bushman tracker could tell that the bull stood around for quite a while. He then walked away for about 500 meters, shook a mopane tree violently, walked back to where the truck stood, and then finally moved off in the direction the herd went. His spoor then was obliterated by those of the herd. But from what we could gather, the herd came back to drink. You must bear in mind that all this took place during the night. The following questions arose:

- (a) How did he find the place where our truck was standing?
  - (b) Is it possible that the tree shaking was meant to attract our attention with the hope that we would reveal our presence?
  - (c) Did he go after the herd and bring it back to the water?
- (3) Regarding your comment on page 30 on the possibility of co-existence between elephant and man, I fear that the only hope for elephants is within the boundaries of national or other parks, because they are well known for the destruction of fences and crops. This means that they must be confined within the boundaries of above mentioned parks. Their effect on the habitat is also known. The question arose: Is an equilibrium between elephants and their habitat possible? This will obviously depend on the following factors:

- (a) Species composition of the habitat. (They select some trees for debarking, while others are pushed over for various reasons.)
- (b) Density of elephants.
- (c) Regeneration of the tree stratum.

If we bear in mind that many things in nature happen in circles, it might be possible that before man interferes, the elephants might have utilized a certain home range until they have practically destroyed it, then:

- (a) move off to an unutilized area, and after its destruction return to the original area after 10, 20 or maybe a hundred years?
- (b) stay in the area regardless, until the population dies off because of a lack of food, shade, etc. with eventually only a limited number of individuals surviving. From these survivors a new population might develop along with the regeneration of the habitat. (Might this be the reason [through natural selection] for the elephant's longevity or vice versa?)

Finally, the biggest problem facing conservators is the determination of carrying capacity of a given area, if at all possible.

Our aerial census this summer revealed that the elephant population is still stable.

Yours truly,  
Pieter deVilliers

March 26, 1979

Dear Hezy (assuming elephant lovers operate on a first name basis):

Thanks for your prompt response...I especially appreciate the computer search, which takes a lot of the donkey work out of keeping current...

Sincerely yours,  
Richard Lair

June 22, 1978

Dear Mr. Shoshani:

I cannot tell you how happy I was to receive the Newsletter No. 2 and to see that my request for information had been included!

Another thing that I would like to explain is how I arrived at the notion that an elephant can lift 3.75% of its own weight with its trunk alone. I read in an encyclopedia that the largest teak log known to have been lifted with the trunk alone weighed 600 pounds, and that the largest working elephants weigh 8 tons. I divided maximum load by maximum weight, 600/16,000, and got 3.75%.

But when I read on page 29 of Newsletter 2 that Jumbo, ballyhooed to be a giant among elephants, weighed only 6½ tons, I need help to explain the

difference between 8 tons and 6½ tons. Any suggestions? \*

The rest of this letter is devoted to my mechanical model of elephant trunk muscle tissue and its sheer conjecture, so you may be well advised to skip to "Best regards."

Norris Whitehill

\* Yes. Consult the 36th reference in Elephant Newsletter No. 1, page 196 (in that article), reference 331 (newsletter No. 2), page 179, and reference 680 (this issue), page 26. It can be seen that at the age of 25 the African elephant's body weight is below 4 tons. Jumbo, therefore, was "a giant among elephants."

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