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Observing Elephants in Africa

Richard Van Gelder

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OBSERVING ELEPHANTS IN AFRICA

by Richard Van Gelder

Richard Van Gelder has been conducting field research in Africa, off and on for the past ten years. Although he has been specifically studying antelopes, he "could not avoid having an interest in elephants". The following information is based on two recent, independent visits to Africa. The first set of observations was made during September/October of 1977 in the Savuti Channel area of Chobe National Park in Botswana while he was studying tsessebe (Damaliscus lunatus). The second set of observations was made during a two and a half week visit to Kenya in March of 1978.

I. Observation in the Savuti Channel area of Chobe National Park, Botswana.

My informal census suggests that there are still good numbers of elephants in the region. I believe that there were fewer bulls there this year than a year ago, but this is more likely a response of a greater amount of water still standing in the pans this year, so that all of the animals did not come into Savuti marsh, where I did most of my work. Further, I definitely detected the presence of more cow herds this year than last, and larger-sized herds, as well. There seemed to be good reproduction in the cow herds. No significant damage to vegetation from elephants was noted. I made one trip from the Savuti Marsh to the Linyanti River in October, and again was impressed with seeing several quite large (50+) cow herds.

II. Observations in Kenya.

I didn't see a lot of elephants, at least not what I am used to from previous visits, all of which were from August to November, at the height of the dry season. It was unbelievably green--evidently the short rains were late and heavy, and the long rains were starting while we were there. Seven national parks were visited. All in all, I doubt that I saw 500 elephants in the two and a half weeks in Kenya, and I know that is far less than I have ever seen before.