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Recent Correspondence

Elephant Editors

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RECENT CORRESPONDENCE

The following are letters, responses or excerpts from those sent to our office. They are released with permission of the writers or in accordance with a note given on page 47 of Elephant Number 3. Correspondence is presented chronologically.

From Tom Dunstan's EIG questionnaire received October 15, 1981:

Dear Mr. Shoshani-

Congratulations on E.I.G. publications and on opening up talk and papers to all elephant personnel as this helps to close long secretive gaps that for years information in some respects was a trade secret. It is good to see this communication open up in the animal field. In reference to (Lewis letter) Vol. 1 No. 4, Fall 1980, Pages 186-187, I must agree with Mr. Lewis and congratulate his wording of the letter. In reading this I would say that it is the complete elephant training manual on those two pages. I share his views 100%.

Keep up the good work and looking forward to the next publication.

Sincerely,

Tom Dunstan
Senior Elephant Keeper
Metro Toronto Zoo

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The following letter was sent to us by Leigh M. Van Valen for a reply.

November 4, 1981

Dear Dr. Van Valen:

I had no idea there was some controversy concerning the existence of the pygmy elephant.

When in Zaire (1972-74) I often talked to an American Protestant missionary who lived in a town where I sometimes bought supplies. He had lived in Zaire several years, had been a hunter, and was familiar with the forest. I found him interesting to talk to, especially about primates.

Once he told me of an encounter with a small group of pygmy elephants. He described a fully grown male, tusks et al., as being about 6 ft. tall. He encountered them in an extremely remote area which he pointed out on a map. I believed him then and I believe him now, although, of course, I can't confirm their existence.

When I wished to refer to them in my C.A. comment, I looked them up in a field guide to African mammals and they were there.

I include a copy of the page where the elephants are referred to from the field guide and the reference (P. 165, in Dorst, J., and P. Dandelot. 1970. A field guide to the larger mammals of Africa. Collins, London, 287 pp.) in hopes it will be of some assistance. When - and if - I ever get back to Zaire I'll see if I can find them for you.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur Horn

Our response involved much research and thought; this is it in full.

May 10, 1982

Dr. Arthur D. Horn
Department of Anthropology
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523

Dear Dr. Horn:

Your letter (dated November 4, 1981 and addressed to Dr. Leigh M. Van Valen) regarding the existence of the pygmy elephant was sent to our office by Dr. Van Valen to provide a reply. Enclosed please find photocopies of literature pertaining to the so-called pygmy elephant. The enclosures are from the following sources:

Page 383-384 and photograph, from: Kunz, G.F. 1916.
Ivory and the elephant in art, in archaeology, and in science. Doubleday, Page and Company, New York, 527 pp.

Page 9 including photograph, from: Hornaday, W.T. 1924. The elephant in jungle, zoo and circus. The Mentor, 12(5):3-19.

Page 1196 from: Osborn, H.F. 1942. Proboscidea. Amer. Mus. Press, New York, 2:805-1675.

Page 10-14, from: Sanderson, I.T. 1962. The dynasty of Abu: a history and natural history of the elephants and their relatives, past and present. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 376 pp.

Pages 1-5, from: Ansell, W.F.H. 1971. Order Proboscidea. Part 11 in The mammals of Africa: an identification manual (J. Meester and H.W. Setzer, eds.). Smithsonian Inst. Press, Washington, D.C., 325 pp.

Page 7, 12-16, from: Sikes, S.K. 1971. The natural history of the African elephant. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 397 pp.

Page 1, from: Laursen, L., and M. Bekoff. 1978. Loxodonta africana. Mammalian Species, 92:1-8. (Published by the American Society of Mammalogists.)

The alleged subspecies of the pygmy or dwarf elephant was described by Noack in 1906. (Noack, T. 1906. Eine Zwergform des afrikanischen Elefanten. Zool. Anz., 24: 631-633.) Noack named the then-new subspecies Elephas africanus pumilio. As can be seen from page 1 in Laursen and Bekoff pumilio is synonymous to the forest African elephant Loxodonta africana cyclotis.

You have probably noticed that the photographs of the pygmy elephant in Kunz and Hornaday are identical to the elephant that was known as "Congo". Both Hornaday and Kunz referred to Congo as a new or distinct species but as can be seen from the age of Congo in Kunz, she was 11 years old when the photograph was taken, height 5 feet, weight 1,650 pounds. Sanderson (page 14) stated that Congo "grew from 3 feet 7 inches (weighing 601 pounds) to 6 feet 8 inches between 1906 and 1915 and was still not full grown at death." This, he states, puts it in the L. cyclotis class. The information in Osborn, the discussion in Ansell and many other sources indicate that there is one species and two subspecies: The Bush African elephant (Loxodonta africana africana), and the forest African elephant (Loxodonta africana cyclotis). Ansell noted that

"It seems clear that most alleged pygmy elephants have really been immature specimens,..." Please also note that Sikes (page 7) refers to the pygmy elephant as the "pygmy elephant' myth".

I hope that the above information answers your inquiry concerning the existence of the living pygmy elephant. To summarize, earlier workers including some contemporary writers (such as Dorst and Dandelot whom you cited) believe(d) that there exists a distinct species or subspecies of the African elephant, namely the dwarf form. However, recent workers believe that the dwarf elephant phenomenon may be a local variation, confined to a particular population or a deme. Alternatively, the small size of the elephant depicted is due to the immature individual photographed. I tend to side with the view of recent workers.

You are aware, I am sure, of the existence of extinct dwarf or pygmy elephants of varying degrees that were found in the Mediterranean islands, the smallest being Elephas falconeri whose fossil remains were discovered on the island of Sicily. (See Maglio, V.J. 1973. Origin and evolution of the Elephantidae. Trans. Amer. Philos. Soc., 63(3):1-149.) There were also dwarf forms of extinct elephants on the Channel Islands off the coast of California (Roth, Virginia L. 1982. Dwarf mammoths from the Santa Barbara California channel Islands: size, shape, development and evolution. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, 277 pp.).

Should you require additional information please do not hesitate to write.

Sincerely yours,

Jeheskel (Hezy) Shoshani
Editor, Elephant

JS/vw
Enclosures
cc: Leigh M. Van Valen, Ph.D.

----- . . -----
From an EIG order form dated November 23, 1981 come these comments:

Dear Hezy or ...

.... As a comment, I would like to suggest that future issues of Elephant could be a lot shorter and more

to the point than previous effort. As an information exchange, it would be much more useful if it was cheaper, more concise, and more frequent and up-to-date. More extensive Supplements could be put out periodically, if necessary.

Thanks again.

Yours sincerely,

Keith Lindsay

We have found that there are many paths by which news of the Elephant Interest Group travels. Following are two unusual ways:

February 6, 1982

Dear Sir,

Yesterday, at the Tucson Annual Library Book Sale I found a copy of the fourth issue of Elephant and purchased it for my son, Patrick. In looking through it I noticed that you raise funds by selling T-shirts among other things. I would like very much to purchase a (size large) shirt for my son ...

Thank you,

Daniel D. Dugan

This is the text of a letter written to The Christian Science Monitor and printed in the section "Readers write" on Monday, May 17, 1982.

A plug for pachyderms

A friend gave us a copy of the column "Lightly Le Pelley" from April 28, entitled "Forget not the elephant". We members of the Elephant Interest Group wish to say loudly that the elephant "is not saved" and that there are many people all over the world protesting the diminishing numbers of Asian and African elephants. Our membership constitutes nearly 900 individuals and organizations from keepers and trainers, park wardens, and elephant-lovers to university professors.

Detroit

Sandra S. Lash
Associate Editor
"Elephant"

As of May 30, 1982, two inquiries about EIG have been received in response to this last letter:

Dear Ms. Lash:

I read with interest your letter to the editor in today's "Monitor".

Will you please send me information on your organization. I am just an ordinary elephant-lover.

Sincerely,

Verity L. Feldmann
(Mrs. Clarence Feldmann)

Dear Ms. Lash,

I would love to join your Elephant Interest Group (read your note to the Monitor today). Elephants have been a special interest and love of mine since I was a little girl. My first work of art (clay sculpture) was an elephant, about 35 years ago.

Send whatever info you have.

Sincere regards,

(Mrs.) Barbara Cook