

African Elephants & Asian Elephants

Elephants are the largest land animals on Earth. They have characteristic long noses, or trunks; large, floppy ears; and wide, thick legs. There are two species of elephant. The Asian elephant and the African elephant live on separate continents and have many unique features.



Size

African elephants are the larger of the two species. They grow 2.5 to 4 meters from shoulder to toe and weigh 2,268 to 6,350 kilograms. Asian elephants can grow up to 2 to 3 metres from shoulder to toe and weigh up to 2,041 to 4,990 kilograms.

Habitat

African elephants live in sub-Saharan Africa, the rain forests of Central and West Africa and the Sahel desert in Mali. Asian elephants live in Nepal, India and Southeast Asia in scrub forests and rain forests.

Diet

Elephants eat grasses, roots, fruit and bark. They use their tusks to pull the bark from trees and dig roots out of the ground.

An elephant has an appetite that matches its size. An adult can eat 136 kilograms of food in a day.



Older elephants with larger tusks are becoming rarer due to their ivory.

Habits

A group of elephants is called a herd. The herd is led by a **matriarch**, which is the oldest female. Females, as well as young and old elephants, stick together in a herd. Adult males tend to wander on their own.

Elephants also have certain rules. For example, when they are meeting each other, they expect the other elephant to extend its trunk in greeting. The matriarch will often teach young elephants in her herd how to behave properly.

Elephants

Elephants live in Africa and India and are the largest animals that live on land.

What do elephants look like?

Elephants have tough grey skin and large ears. They have a long nose called a trunk that they use to drink water. African elephants have bigger ears than Indian elephants. Elephants have tusks to protect them from other animals.

What do elephants eat?

Elephants are herbivores and eat bark and leaves from trees.

What do elephants do?

Elephants are usually very gentle but can get quite cross. Elephants are very clever and know how to find water even when it is far away. When they find water they like to swim.



A bull elephant

Did you know?

A mother elephant is called a cow. The dad is a bull and a baby is called a calf!



African elephant

BEST FEATURE

Their long trunks that are an extension of their upper lip and nose. They have two finger-like points at the end of their trunks that they use for grabbing things.

SIZE

They are 3m tall and weigh up to 6 tonnes – making them the largest land mammal on Earth.



FAVOURITE FOOD

They are herbivores, and eat roots, grasses and bark. They need to eat a couple of hundred kilograms of plant matter a day!

HOME

They are savannah elephants and live in grassy plains and woodlands. The smaller forest elephant is found in the rain forests of central and western Africa.



CURRENT POPULATION

Around 600,000.

BIGGEST THREAT

Poachers who hunt them for their ivory tusks.

THAT'S A FACT!

Their trunks have around 150,000 muscles.

Elephant facts

- 1) There are *three* different species of elephant - the **African Savannah elephant**, the **African Forest elephant** and the **Asian elephant**. Elephants are known for their **large ears**, **tusks made of ivory** and their **trunks**.
- 2) Elephants are the world's **largest land animal**! Male African elephants can reach **3m tall** and **weigh between 4,000 -7,500kg**.
- 3) You can tell a lot about an elephant by looking at their tusks! Elephant tusks **never stop growing**, so enormous tusks can be a sign of an old elephant. Both male and female African elephants grow tusks.
- 4) These magnificent mammals spend between **12 to 18 hours** eating **grass, plants** and **fruit** every single day! They use their long trunks to smell their food and lift it up into their mouth.
- 5) All that eating means one thing, an awful lot of **poo**! Each elephant creates about one tonne of poo per week, which keeps the **soil fertile** and **disperses tree seeds**. Elephants also **dig** waterholes and **create footpaths**, literally changing the landscape around them!
- 6) Elephants have created their very own **sunscreen**! After a river or swamp bath, they'll throw mud and sand up and over themselves to protect their skin from the hot, burning sun.
- 7) Sadly, elephants are in trouble. Many are killed by humans for their **ivory** tusks.

FACTS ABOUT ELEPHANTS

WHERE THEY LIVE

African savannah elephants are found in 37 countries south of the Sahara Desert. African forest elephants live in the dense rainforests of west and central Africa. The Asian elephant is found in India, Sri Lanka, China and much of Southeast Asia.

DIET

Elephants eat grasses, leaves, bamboo, bark, roots. Elephants are also known to eat crops like banana and sugarcane which are grown by farmers. Adult elephants eat 300-400 lbs of food per day.

POPULATION

At the turn of the 20th century, there were a few million African elephants and about 100,000 Asian elephants. Today, there are an estimated 450,000 - 700,000 African elephants and between 35,000 - 40,000 wild Asian elephants.

BEHAVIOR

Elephants form strong family bonds and live in tight family groups of related females called a herd. The herd is led by the oldest and often largest female in the herd, called a matriarch. Herds consist of 8-100 individuals depending on family size. When a calf is born, it is raised and protected by the whole herd. Males leave the family unit between the ages of 12-15 and live alone or sometimes live temporarily with other males.

Elephants are extremely intelligent animals and have memories that span many years. It is this memory that serves matriarchs well during dry seasons when they need to guide their herds, sometimes for tens of miles, to watering holes that they remember from the past. They also display signs of grief, joy, anger and play.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

African elephants are the largest land animals on Earth!

Trunks and Tusks

Elephant ears radiate heat to help keep these large animals cool, but sometimes the African heat is too much. Elephants are fond of water and enjoy showering by sucking water into their trunks and spraying it all over themselves. Afterwards, they often spray their skin with a protective coating of dust.

An elephant's trunk is actually a long nose used for smelling, breathing, trumpeting, drinking, and also for grabbing things—especially a meal. The trunk alone contains about 100,000 different muscles. African elephants have two finger-like features on the end of their trunk that they can use to grab small items.

Both male and female African elephants have tusks they use to dig for food and water and strip bark from trees. Males use the tusks to battle one another, but the ivory has also attracted violence of a far more dangerous sort.

Because ivory is so valuable to some humans, many elephants have been killed for their tusks. This trade is illegal today, but it has not completely stopped, and some African elephant populations remain endangered.



DID YOU KNOW?

African elephant tusks can grow up to 2 metres long!

Diet

Elephants eat roots, grasses, fruit, and bark, and they eat a lot of these things. An adult elephant can eat up to 300 pounds of food in a single day.

These hungry animals do not sleep much, and they roam over great distances while foraging for the large quantities of food that they require to sustain their massive bodies.



Scratching on a tree helps to remove layers of dead skin and parasites.

Herds and Habitat

Female elephants (cows) live in family herds with their young, but adult males (bulls) tend to roam on their own.

Having a baby elephant is a serious commitment. Elephants have a longer pregnancy than any other mammal—almost 22 months. Cows usually give birth to one calf every two to four years. At birth, elephants already weigh some 200 pounds and stand about 3 feet tall.