

African Elephant

Scientific Name: *Loxodonta africana*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Proboscidea

Family: Elephantidae



Elephants are the largest living land animal and have a unique trunk and tusks that no other animal has. The trunk contains more than 100,000 muscles and is capable of both great strength and great dexterity. In addition, the elephant has enormous ears that it flaps back and forth as a threat display, or to cool its body. Males can grow to 11½ feet tall and weigh 12,000 pounds. Females can grow to 9 feet and weigh 6,000 to 10,000 pounds. Despite their great bulk they walk in digitigrade fashion, that is, on their toes. Elephants usually live in herds of related females and their offspring. The leader is an elderly female. The males live apart either singly or in all-male herds. Elephants roam over wide ranges and can walk for many hours without rest. They can use their sensitive trunks to detect a rainstorm up to 15 miles away. They will walk to feed on the lush plant growth the rain causes or to drink the water. When walking the herd covers about four miles per hour, but they can sustain a rate of eight miles per hour when necessary.

They can run for short distances at up to 25 mph and can easily overtake a human sprinter. They can walk or swim across a river, but cannot jump over a ditch only 5 feet wide. Elephant babies weigh 200+ lbs. at birth, and nurse for 2 years.

They need 13 to 15 years to mature. All herd members care for all babies.

Range

Africa south of the Sahara

Habitat

Savannas, river valleys, thorn bush, dense forest and desert scrub

Gestation

19 to 22 months

Litter

1

Behavior

Elephants usually live in herds of related females and their offspring. The leader is an elderly female. The males live apart either singly or in all-male herds. Elephants roam over wide ranges and can walk for many hours without rest. They can use their sensitive trunks to detect a rainstorm up to 15 miles away. They will walk there to feed on the lush plant growth the rain causes or to drink the water. When walking the herd covers about four miles per hour, but they can sustain a rate of eight miles per hour when necessary. They can run for short distances at up to 25 mph and can easily overtake a human sprinter. They can walk or swim across a river, but cannot jump over a ditch only 5 feet wide. They are highly intelligent, and have been observed using tools. When the last of six sets of teeth wear down, they will die of starvation.

Reproduction

Elephant babies weigh 200+ lbs. at birth, and nurse for 2 years. They take 8 to 12 years to mature. All herd members care for all babies. They are frequently touched by adult females as a sign of reassurance.

Wild Diet

Leaves, bark, fruit, grass, twigs and roots