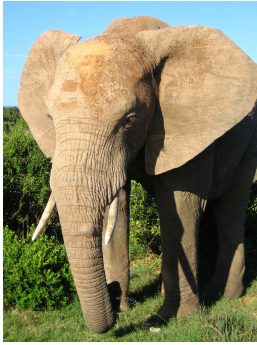


Elephant

Elephant	
	
An African elephant in South Africa	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Subphylum:	Vertebrata
Superclass:	Tetrapoda
Class:	Mammalia
Subclass:	Theria
Superorder:	Afrotheria
Order:	Proboscidea
Superfamily:	Elephantoidea
Family:	Elephantidae Gray, 1821

Elephants are the largest living land mammals. The largest elephant recorded was one shot in Angola, 1974. It weighed 27,060 pounds (13.5 tons) and stood 13 feet 8 inches tall.

At birth, an elephant calf may weigh 100 kg (225 pounds). The baby elephant develops for 20 to 22 months inside its mother. No other land animal takes this long to develop before being born.

Physical description

There are two living genera of elephants. These are African *Loxodonta africanus*, and Asian elephants *Elephas maximus*.



The African elephant, *Loxodonta africana*, in Luanga National Park, Zambia

Trunk

An elephant's most obvious part is the trunk. The trunk is a very long nose, made from the upper lip. An elephant uses its trunk to grab objects such as food. Though the rest of an elephant's hide is strong and thick, its trunk is very soft and sensitive. Elephants avoid Acacia trees with symbiotic ants because they can bite the inside of an elephant's trunk.^[1]

Teeth

Elephants also have tusks. Tusks are large teeth coming out of their upper jaws. A lot of ivory comes from elephant tusks. Ivory traders killed many elephants, so now hunting them is illegal. The trunk is also used when it trumpets. The elephant usually stands still, raises its trunk, and blows. This is a signal to other elephants and wildlife.

African elephants are larger and have bigger ears. They are browser/grazers: they eat leaves, branches and grass. These big ears have many *veins*, which carry blood throughout the body. Biologists think that the blood going through their ears helps African elephants to cool off. The weather is hotter in Africa than in Asia, so it is hard for elephants to stay cool. Female African elephants have tusks, but female Asian elephants do not. African elephants have a low place in their back. African elephants have two "fingers" at the end of their trunks, but Asian elephants only have one. Indian elephants eat mainly grass.

Grass wears down their teeth.^[source?] Elephants use their teeth in sequence, not all at once. This means that, at any time, they only have one tooth in each jaw, that's a total of four.

In total, they have 24 teeth: 12 front teeth, called premolars, and 12 back teeth, called molars. When the last molar wears out, the elephant dies because it cannot eat. They can live for about 70 years. But in a zoo or circus, people can keep elephants alive by feeding them soft food.

Some African elephants live on the savanna while others live in the forest. Today, many people think these are different species. Scientists named the forest group *Loxodonta cyclotis* and the savanna group *Loxodonta africanus*.

Uses

Humans have used elephants for different things. The Carthaginian general Hannibal took some elephants across the Alps when he fought the Romans. He probably used the North African elephant, a kind of elephant that does not live today. It was smaller than other African elephants.



A Bombay man rides on an elephant.

People have used Indian elephants to move around and to have fun. Many circuses have them. Siamese, Indians, and other South Asians used them for several things. They fought in armies, and they crushed criminals. They also did heavy work like lifting trees and moving logs.

However, people have never *domesticated* elephants. Domesticated animals are tame and have babies under human control. The male elephant in heat is dangerous and hard to control. This state is called musth. Most elephants used by people are female, except those used in war. In a battle, female elephants run from males, so armies needed males.

In the wild, elephants have strong family groups. Their ways of acting toward other elephants are hard for people to understand. They "talk" to each other with very low sounds. Most elephants sounds are so low, people cannot hear them. But elephants can hear these sounds far away.

The earliest known ancestors of modern-day elephants evolved about 60 million years ago. The ancestor of the elephants from 37 million years ago was aquatic and had a similar lifestyle to a hippopotamus.^[2] Elephants are related to sea cows, which are large aquatic mammals.

The extinct animals called mammoths were relatives of today's elephants. Modern elephants live only in warm places, but the woolly mammoth had long hair and lived in cold places during the ice age.

Status today

Both African and Asian elephants are endangered species. The populations of both African and Asian elephants have tripled in the past six years.

Taxonomy

- *Loxodonta*: African elephants
 - African Bush Elephant, *Loxodonta africana*
 - African Forest Elephant, *Loxodonta cyclotis*
- Genus *Elephas*: Eurasian elephants
 - Asian Elephant, *Elephas maximus*

Family life

A female elephant will have a single baby (often called a "calf"), usually weighing about 90 kilograms when it is born, every four or five years. An elephant's gestation lasts about 22 months. Another female elephant often stays with the new mother until its baby is born. The newborn elephant can often stand within a half hour after it is born. Mother elephants touch their babies gently with their trunks. It takes a baby a year or more to control its trunk and learn its many uses.

Baby elephants nurse for the first two years of their lives. After it is born, the first thing that the baby does is wobble in search of its mother's milk. It drinks about 10 liters of milk every day.

Miscellaneous

White elephants are considered holy in Thailand.

The most famous fictional elephant is Dumbo. It is a flying elephant in a Disney movie. *The Elephant's Child* is one of Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*

Ganesha is the god of wisdom in Hinduism. He has an elephant's head.

The elephant is the symbol for the United States Republican Party. It is like the Democratic Party's donkey. The first person to use the elephant as a symbol for the Republican Party was Thomas Nast. He did that in a Harper's Weekly cartoon in 1874.

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- [1] Mutualism with ants occur on Acacia trees in Africa, such as the Whistling Thorn acacia. The acacias provide shelter for ants in the thorns and nectar in extrafloral nectaries for their symbiotic ants such as *Crematogaster mimosae*. In turn, the ants protect the plant by attacking large mammalian herbivores and stem-boring beetles which damage the plant.
- [2] Elephant 'had aquatic ancestor' (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/7347284.stm>). BBC News. April 15, 2008.

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