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**TEACHING  
TOOLS  
ABOUT**

# ELEPHANTS



**WILD CLASSROOM**

**EDUCATOR'S RESOURCE GUIDE**



## WILD CLASSROOM

WWF's Wild Classroom connects educators and parents with the tools and resources they need to help kids explore and understand the world around them. Visit [wildclassroom.org](http://wildclassroom.org) to choose from a growing library of animal- and nature-related teacher's guides, fact sheets, and activity plans that you can use to enhance your science, writing, art, and other lessons.

Together we can inspire the next generation to build a future where people and nature thrive!

# ELEPHANTS

## ● Elephant Fun Facts

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- An elephant's trunk is an extension of the upper lip and nose, and it serves many other purposes too—as a hand to pick up objects; a horn to trumpet a warning; an arm to use for touching and to raise in greeting; a snorkel to breathe through when swimming; and a hose for drinking water or bathing.
- An elephant trunk has up to 150,000 muscle units (by comparison, a human has around 600 muscles in his/her entire body).
- Tusks are massive, deeply rooted teeth that perform a variety of functions for the elephant, such as digging, lifting objects, gathering food, stripping bark from trees to eat, protecting the trunk, and defense.
- Elephants are either left- or right-tusked. The tusk they use most often is usually smaller because of wear and tear.
- Elephants are herbivores and can eat up to 600 pounds of vegetation a day. They can spend up to 18 hours a day eating grasses, leaves, roots, bark, and fruit.
- Elephants need a lot of water to survive. They consume 50 to 60 gallons of water a day.
- Elephants can live to be between 60 and 70 years old in the wild.
- Female elephants are more social than males. They form herds of related females that are led by the oldest female, the "matriarch."
- Elephant herds follow the same, seasonal migration routes year after year in search of food and water. It is the role of the matriarch to lead the herd along these routes.
- Healthy adult elephants have no natural predators; the threats to their survival all stem from human activities.
- Elephants show emotions similar to humans' and understand what other elephants are feeling. They have been observed caring for wounded individuals and mourning their dead.



- In order to protect themselves from getting sunburned, elephants throw sand on their back and head.
- Elephants can detect the Earth's vibrations with sensory cells in their feet. Elephants can hear warnings sent through the ground from other elephants. They can sense the time between signals to determine the direction of the vibration. Elephants have been known to detect a thunderstorm from miles away and head toward it, hoping to find water.
- Elephants are extremely intelligent animals and have keen memory skills. They are also one of the few animals capable of recognizing their own reflection.

## ● Elephant Q & A

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### What is an elephant's extinction risk?

Asian elephants and African savanna elephants are currently listed as endangered, while African forest elephants are listed as critically endangered.

### How many elephants are in the wild?

Over 350,000 elephants still roam Africa's savannas, but populations are decreasing in many areas. There are fewer than 80,000 African forest elephants and between 41,410–52,345 Asian elephants remaining in the wild.

### Where do elephants live?

Savanna and forest elephants are found roaming across 37 different countries in Africa, with about half of the total population in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA), which is the world's largest protected land area that crosses multiple countries, covering a territory roughly the size of France and spanning parts of five southern African countries: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Asian elephants are found in 13 countries in Asia, with more than half of the total population found in India.

### What is an elephant's weight?

Elephants are the largest land mammals on Earth, weighing four to six tons.

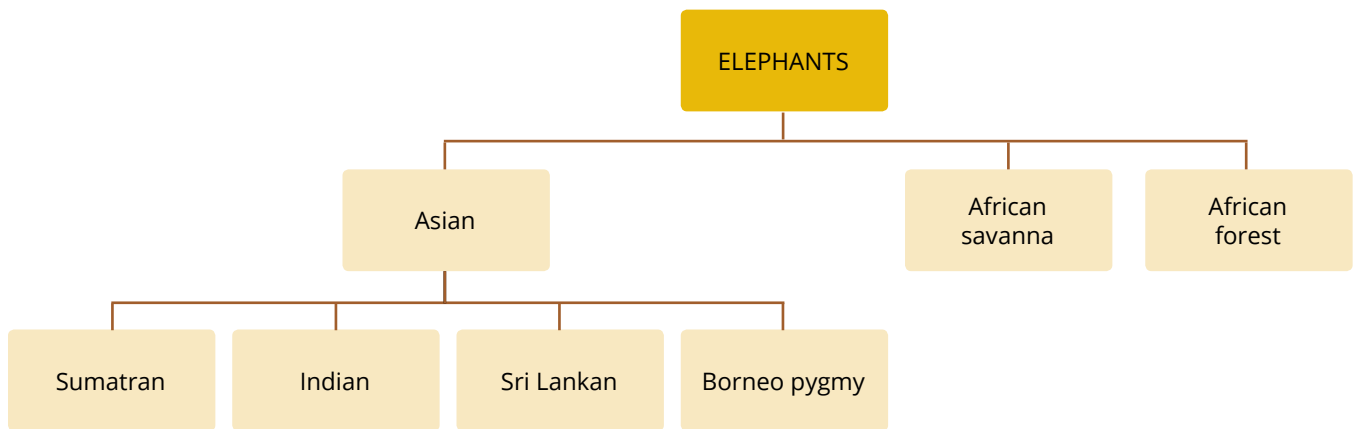
### How big is an elephant?

18 to 24 feet



## How many subspecies of elephant are there?

There are three primary species: African savanna elephants, African forest elephants, and Asian elephants. Among Asian elephants, there are four subspecies—Sumatran, Indian, Sri Lankan, and Borneo pygmy.



## How do the elephant species differ from one another?

Aside from where they live, there are several physical differences between Asian, African savanna, and African forest elephants. Some of them are included here:

Asian elephants are smaller in size and also have smaller ears than the other elephant species. African savanna elephants are the largest of the three species and have fan-like ears that are shaped like the African continent. Their forest elephant cousins are smaller and have smaller, rounder ears to better navigate thick brush. Only a small percentage of male Asian elephants have tusks, but all male and female African savanna and forest elephants have tusks. Asian elephants have five toenails on their forefeet and African elephant species have four. Asian elephants have a single upper lip at the tip of the trunk; African savanna and forest elephants have two lips at the end of the trunk.

## How do elephants raise their young?

Elephants have the longest pregnancy of any mammal, lasting 22 months. A calf is born to a female once every four to five years and will be cared for by the mother and other females in the herd for several years. At around four years old, the calf will start to make its first independent moves. Females often remain with the family unit for their entire life; males tend to leave the matriarchal group by the time they are around 10–14 years old and either live in smaller groups with other males or by themselves.



## ● Why Elephants Matter

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### **Elephants contribute to the health of their habitats.**

When elephants eat seed-bearing plants and fruits, the seeds often pass through their digestive tract undigested (exiting their body through their poop!). This helps spread these plants across landscapes. African forest elephants, in particular, are known for their vast consumption of a variety of seeds and their ability to disperse them over large areas, contributing to tree diversity. Elephants are, essentially, the gardeners of the forest. In the tropical forests of Asia and Africa, elephants create pathways that other animals also use, as well as clearings and gaps in the canopy that allow trees to redevelop. In the savannas, elephants help clear the thickness of trees, creating an environment favorable to a variety of other plants and animals. In addition, when there isn't any surface water, elephants will dig for water. This provides other animals access to water as well. Elephants are considered to be the engineers of the ecosystems they live in. All of these factors contribute to healthy, flourishing landscapes that provide habitat for a rich diversity of other species.

### **Elephants improve the lives of people in their communities.**

By protecting species like elephants, we're also protecting the environment and ensuring the presence of important needs like clean water, air, soil, food, and energy. The availability of these essentials improves the health of humans and other animals living in these areas and provides a positive outlook for future generations. Elephants, and other wildlife, are also popular with tourists who travel to observe them in the wild. This can be an important source of income for communities that live alongside them.

### **Elephants have a large role in culture.**

Elephants are important cultural icons, especially in Southeast Asia. In Hinduism, the powerful god honored before all sacred rituals is the elephant-headed Lord Ganesha, who is also called the Remover of Obstacles and is the god of wisdom.





## ● The Threats Elephants Face

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In Asia and Africa, the most significant long-term threat facing elephants is habitat loss, which leads to more risks when they encounter humans in search of needs like food and water. In Africa, elephants are also threatened by poaching (unlawful hunting) for their tusks to supply the illegal elephant ivory trade. Elephants in Asia are now also facing the increasing threat of poaching not only for ivory from tusked males but also for skin used for various purposes.

### Poaching and illegal wildlife trade

Behind every piece of ivory—either a full tusk or carved trinket—is a dead elephant. Poachers kill about 20,000 elephants in Africa every year, one every 25 minutes, for their tusks. The tusks are then traded illegally and often end up carved and sold as decorative pieces. The international trade of elephant ivory has been banned since 1989, but as long as people continue to buy elephant ivory and ivory products, markets selling them will continue to exist. Even though the trade is illegal, there are still a significant number of people interested in buying elephant ivory for the wealth and beauty they claim it represents. And as long as there is a demand, elephants will remain at risk. Since only male Asian elephants have tusks, poaching of males has resulted in more females in some areas and the majority of males being tuskless. A large number of Asian elephants are also taken from the wild for live elephant trade and are primarily kept in captivity for the tourism industry.



*African savanna elephant.*



## Habitat loss

As human populations and industry continue to expand into critical elephant habitat, elephants have less room to roam than ever before. Land is converted for agriculture, specifically to make room for the farming of products like rice and oil palm—a highly desirable crop that is used in many food products. Habitat is also being disrupted for human uses such as houses, roads, and pipelines. Elephant herds rely on traveling historic migratory routes that have been key to their ancestors’ survival for generations. As habitat is lost to development, these routes are blocked, forcing elephants to travel elsewhere in search of the resources they need (food, water, mates).

## Human-wildlife conflict

As elephant habitats are converted for human uses, elephants and people are increasingly coming into contact with one another. Elephants enter farmers’ fields and damage valuable crops, sometimes damaging property and injuring or killing people in the process. Out of anger or revenge, the farmers occasionally kill these elephants to protect their property and their families. In India alone, each year an average of 100 elephants and 400 people are killed as a result of human-elephant conflict, and about half a million families are affected by crop-raiding elephants.

## Climate change

Elephants have a number of traits that make them vulnerable to a changing climate. They are sensitive to high temperatures and susceptible to a variety of diseases. Elephants also need to drink up to 60 gallons of water a day. As the climate changes, temperatures in Africa are rising and rain is becoming less frequent. With less fresh water available, elephants and humans are competing for the same limited resources, often resulting in conflict.



*African savanna elephant herd, Botswana.*



## ● How WWF Is Helping Elephants and Wildlife

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WWF works to conserve elephants by supporting an end to poaching and illegal elephant ivory trade, improving elephant protection and management, and reducing human-elephant conflict.

### Putting a stop to poaching and illegal wildlife trade

In 1989, WWF helped to bring about a ban on international ivory trade, helping to reduce the demand for elephant ivory. Working with TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, WWF continues to monitor sales and helps to identify where and how elephant ivory is being illegally traded and sold. WWF also works with governments to establish protected areas and helps train and equip teams of wildlife rangers who monitor and protect elephants and their environment. Organized troops lead patrols, looking for elephants and signs of poachers, such as snares and other traps. Rangers also help educate local people on the laws concerning poaching.

### Inspiring and informing communities to reduce conflict

WWF works with local communities to use natural resources in a way that helps both wildlife and humans. To help protect crops, WWF works with communities to install electric fences and other barriers to prevent elephant invasions; trains community members to safely drive elephants away from their crop fields and homes; and uses deterrents such as “chili bombs,” a mixture of dried elephant dung and hot chili, to repel elephants (they don’t like the smell). WWF is also testing new technologies like early detection tools to know when elephants are nearby, which gives communities advance warning to protect their crop fields.

### Protecting habitats

To secure a future for elephants, WWF improves existing protected areas while also establishing safe elephant migration passageways in areas such as in KAZA. WWF is working to restore wildlife corridors (areas that animals travel through) in Africa and Asia so that elephants can continue to migrate along their traditional routes without encountering humans. WWF helps governments develop elephant conservation strategies to effectively keep elephants safe.

### Strengthen efforts of species conservation

WWF works to inspire and strengthen regional, national, and international laws and funding for species conservation to protect and recover wildlife populations. WWF is also calling on governments, agriculture industries, and conservation organizations to work together to prevent deforestation and to protect the unique habitats of elephants.





## ● What Kids Can Do

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Share with your students the following actions they can take in their own communities to make a difference for elephants.

### Use eco-friendly products

Get familiar with products that come from elephant habitats and check the label to make sure they're certified as being sustainable (harvested in a way that did not permanently damage the natural resources that they came from). Examples include paper and wooden goods, as well as items that contain palm oil (such as some ice creams, chocolates, shampoos, and detergents). Using sustainable products can help limit the amount of forest habitat lost to plantations that are managed irresponsibly.

### Be aware of illegal wildlife trade

Poaching and illegal wildlife trade are major threats to the future of elephants. Never buy any products that come from elephants, tigers, rhinos, sea turtles, or other endangered species. This includes raw or carved ivory that comes from elephant tusks and teeth, and elephant skin. If you think you see something for sale online or in person that could be made from elephant ivory, be sure to ask questions about where the item came from and what it's made of.

### Gather support and spread the word

When we work together, we can accomplish more. Talk to your family and friends about elephants and what actions we can take to protect them from extinction. Gain support for elephants by starting a club at your school or in your community. Write letters to your local representatives, businesses, and community groups about the importance of elephants and other endangered species, and why they need our protection. By collectively making our voices heard, we can influence others to address concerns that are important to us, including taking better care of nature for the future of our planet.

### Start a fundraiser to help elephants and nature

By organizing a fundraiser with WWF's Panda Nation, you're inspiring others to protect wildlife and wild places. It's a great example of the difference we can make when we work together. Get started at [pandanation.org](http://pandanation.org).



## ● More Elephant Teaching Tools

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### Elephant fill-in-the-blank word puzzle

At the end of this guide, you'll find a word puzzle (with an answer key) based on the educational content covered in this guide.

### Elephant learning activities

Within the Elephant Toolkit, you'll find six fun, engaging activities designed to help students learn about elephants and their habitats:

#### **The Ranger Diaries—Language Arts**

After reading a short article about wildlife rangers, students will compose a journal entry as if they were a ranger, reflecting on their day's work protecting elephants.

#### **How Did the Elephant Cross the Road?—Physical Education**

Students will work together to transport an object safely from one area to another—representing the benefits of wildlife corridors to species such as elephants.

#### **Trade Knowledge, Not Ivory—Social Studies**

To understand the ins and outs of illegal ivory trade, students will perform mini research projects and engage in a team teaching exercise to learn aspects of geography, civics, history, and economics from each other.

#### **Watch Your Noodles for Elephants' Sake—Arts Education**

Students will create a collage to represent the impact a common household ingredient has on elephants' survival.

#### **How to Outsmart an Elephant—Science**

This activity challenges students to use scientific investigation skills to design an experiment to test possible elephant deterrent techniques.

#### **Be the Voice—Language Arts**

Students will create a public service announcement that will raise awareness about wildlife crime and speak up for animals that have no voice.



## Elephant posters

Create an inviting learning space with these free, [downloadable posters](#) of elephants (along with fun facts).

## WWF Together app

For more fun, interactive tools and information about elephants and other wildlife, download the [WWF Together app](#).

## Elephant videos

Visit the [Wild Classroom YouTube channel](#) to view entertaining, informative videos on elephants and other wildlife species.

## Kahoot!

Have your students test their elephant knowledge by playing our “All About Elephants” quiz game. Enjoy all of our wildlife-themed games on [Kahoot! Academy](#).

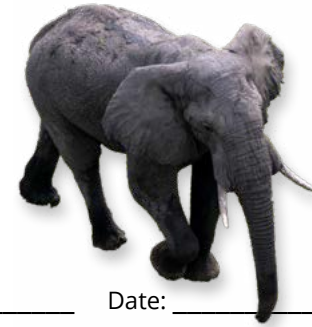


*Asian elephants, Sri Lanka.*



WILD CLASSROOM

# ELEPHANTS



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ELEPHANT WORD PUZZLE

Complete the puzzle with words related to elephants. Use your elephant fact sheets to help you.

1. Elephants have no natural \_\_\_\_\_; humans are their only threat.
2. Elephants are \_\_\_\_\_ and can eat up to 600 pounds of vegetation a day.
3. Elephants show \_\_\_\_\_ similar to humans'.
4. The oldest female in an elephant herd is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Elephants can detect the Earth's vibrations with sensory cells in their \_\_\_\_\_.
6. There are three primary \_\_\_\_\_ of elephants: Asian, African savanna, and African forest.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ are massive, deeply rooted elephant teeth.
8. Asian elephants have the smallest \_\_\_\_\_ of all the elephant species.
9. Elephants are the largest land \_\_\_\_\_ on Earth.
10. Elephants have keen \_\_\_\_\_ skills.
11. Elephants have the longest \_\_\_\_\_ of any mammal, lasting 22 months.
12. More than \_\_\_\_\_ of all Asian elephants are found in India.
13. Elephant herds follow the same \_\_\_\_\_ routes every year.
14. To protect themselves from sunburn, elephants throw \_\_\_\_\_ on their backs.
15. Elephants consume 50 to 60 gallons of \_\_\_\_\_ a day.
16. An elephant trunk has up to 150,000 \_\_\_\_\_ units.

P \_\_\_\_\_

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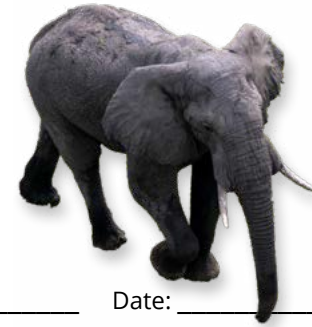
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WILD CLASSROOM

# ELEPHANTS



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ELEPHANT WORD PUZZLE | ANSWER KEY

Complete the puzzle with words related to elephants. Use your elephant fact sheets to help you.

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P R E D A T O R S

H E R B I V O R E S

E M O T I O N S

M A T R I A R C H

F E E T

S P E C I E S

T U S K S

E A R S

M A M M A L S

M E M O R Y

P R E G N A N C Y

H A L F

M I G R A T I O N

S A N D

W A T E R

M U S C L E