

For Creative Minds

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Elephant Herds



Elephants are very smart, social animals. In the wild, elephants live in herds with their extended family. They bond at an early age and they take care of each other. Usually, related females stay together for life while males often go off on their own, make friends with other families, or join other all-male groups.

The female leader, the mighty matriarch, is in charge. She is usually the oldest elephant and has a very good memory. Her job is to lead her herd to grazing sites, favorite watering holes, shaded areas, and safe places to spend the night. Big elephants have big appetites and pachyderms spend up to 20 hours every day foraging, looking for food. They also like to play, bathe, and rest. Elephants can sleep standing up or lying down. When one elephant lies down, another elephant often stands over her, watching her.

Mothers give birth every four to six years and have one baby at a time. Babies' mothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins all care for the young ones, especially as they struggle to learn how to use that long, funny trunk. Every day, elephants communicate with each other through many different sounds, including those that humans cannot hear, as well as gestures, like stomping and flapping their ears. They act like a family unit. When an elephant dies, the rest of the herd mourns.

Zoos

Today's zookeepers have a deep understanding of wild animals and their natural history. Zookeepers try to give their elephants opportunities to exercise, learn, and be in the company of other elephants, as much as possible. Keepers take notes on what the elephants eat and drink, what medicines they take, and their behaviors to ensure they are happy and healthy.

In zoos, exhibits are as large and natural as possible to accommodate groups of elephants who like to roam around and look for food, as well as places to rest and to play. Exhibits might have steep hills and flat spaces, shady areas, watering holes (or streams), and perhaps a mud hole for wallowing. Since elephants need to walk and forage, food may be scattered around the habitat. Hay may be suspended in nets above the elephants' heads so that they have to reach for it, strengthening their neck, back, and trunk muscles. Elephants need to use their large brains, so keepers give them puzzles to solve. When the keepers place chopped up food in barrels with holes in them, the elephants have to figure out the puzzle to get the food. On hot days, the elephants may have a chance to eat huge frozen popsicles. They play with crush-proof toys, Boomer® balls and milk crates.

In zoos, elephants do not perform tricks. Training is all about staying safe and healthy. For example, sometimes elephants in zoos don't get enough exercise and their feet get sore. A keeper may train an elephant to touch her foot to a bar or foot rest. Teaching an elephant to put her foot in place and hold it there gives the keeper time to carefully and safely check her foot and nails.

Sometimes an animal like Maggie is not thriving in the zoo. When this happens, the keepers try their best to take care of the animal. They might change the animal's diet or provide different activities for the animal. If the animal is sick, the keepers make sure the animal gets medical care. If a zoo cannot meet an animal's needs, they find a new place where the animal can live. They might send the animal to a different zoo or to an animal sanctuary.

*If you were an elephant keeper,
what would you do:*

- to take care of the elephant?
- to help the elephant make friends?
- if the elephant got sick?
- if the elephant seemed sad?
- if the elephant needed a new home?



Q&A with Keeper Michelle Harvey

How much food does Maggie eat?

Maggie eats approximately 250 pounds of food a day, but this can vary by season. Her diet consists of hay, grasses, bark, browse (like oak, acacia, and bamboo) herbivore pellets, bran, bread, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Maggie forages for her own food during the day. In the evening, she eats inside the barn.

What is Maggie's favorite food? Does she still get candy for obeying commands?

Maggie's favorite foods are bananas, crusty bread, and acacia branches (which are native to Africa). Maggie is trained using only positive reinforcement techniques, which means she gets treats for doing the correct behaviors. The behaviors she learns allow the keepers and veterinarians to take better care of her. This is a fun, safe, and rewarding way to train animals based on cooperation. There is never punishment. Maggie never has to obey a command; she is a willing participant! Yes, she still gets candy as an extra special reward, like when she gets blood drawn.

Are there any foods that she hates?

Maggie dislikes eggplant, lemons, and limes. She will throw them back at you!

How much does Maggie weigh?

Maggie weighs approximately 8,300 pounds, about the size of a pickup truck. She stands on a scale that is placed in a chute and walks across it to exit the barn. She is rewarded with treats for standing still so we can record her weight.

Does she only drink water?

Yes, Maggie only drinks water, and she likes it really warm. An elephant trunk holds 2.5 gallons of water at a time. Maggie can drink up to 80 gallons a day, as much as two bathtubs full of water.

Does Maggie do tricks?

Maggie does not do tricks but she is free to express herself as an elephant would. She loves to splatter herself in mud, rub her trunk over the other elephants, pull branches off the trees, and chase a flock of turkeys!

Does she have any toys?

Yes. She has a giant Boomer® ball with holes in it. We fill the ball with treats. She rolls and kicks it so that the treats fall out. Maggie and the other elephants also play with logs and branches. They throw them in the air and carry them on their backs. Maggie also loves water play!



Michelle Harvey and Maggie

How loud is Maggie?

Maggie is very vocal. She rumbles, roars, and purrs. When she gets excited or greets another elephant, she trumpets as loud as a jet engine!

Was it hard for Maggie to adapt to the warm weather after being in Alaska for so long?

No. Warm weather is the natural environment for an elephant. This is great for Maggie.

What is a day in the life of Maggie like at PAWS?

Maggie spends her days with other elephants. Lulu is her best friend. She also has Mara, Thika, and Toka, all of whom explore grass, trees, mud holes, a seasonal lake, and rolling hills with her. The weather is often sunny and warm. On cold nights, she can sleep in a heated barn but usually prefers to nap on the grass. She receives a warm bath every day and will rumble or trumpet in delight! Caregivers prepare her morning and evening meals (grain, bran, vitamin supplements, fruits, vegetables, and hay) but once outside, she eats grasses, leaves, and bark. We trim and inspect her feet during training sessions. This is when she may get candy as a special treat! Her day is about doing what she wants. She is never forced to do anything or punished in anyway. She has the freedom just to be an elephant.



How can you tell if Maggie is happy?

I really am not sure if Maggie is happy. She is living a life in captivity instead of being in the wild with her family; but it makes me happy to know she isn't alone. She has elephant friends and a peaceful environment at PAWS. She is loved by all of us who take care of her.

Animal Enrichment

Animals need to keep their brain and senses busy! Would you want to sit in one place all the time with nothing to do? No! Neither do animals. Keepers come up with ways to help the animals exercise their body and mind. This is called animal enrichment.

Keepers create a schedule and continually change activities to keep the elephants interested. They place tasty treats, like carrots, bananas, popsicles, or popcorn, in different places, so that the elephant has to stretch to reach them. New smells, like spices, vinegar, cat nip, or chapstick, give the elephants something to discover and think about. Textured objects, like tree branches, mulch, tires, Boomer® balls, and bouncy balls, are fun for the elephants to touch and move around. Elephants can move around between different play spaces, like waterfalls, streams, and shaded areas

How do you exercise your body and your mind? You might say these are your human enrichment activities!