



Elephants live in families of related females and their young. A family is led by the oldest female, called the *matriarch*. The family shown here is grazing in a grassy clearing in Kenya. The matriarch is in the center front. The largest animal on the left is a visiting male.

Elephant is the largest animal that lives on land. Among all animals, only some kinds of whales are larger. The elephant is also the second tallest member of the animal kingdom. Only the giraffe is taller. Elephants are the only animals that have a nose in the form of a long trunk, which they use as a hand. They have larger ears than any other animal, and their tusks are the largest teeth.

There are two chief kinds of elephants, *African elephants* and *Indian elephants*, also known as *Asian elephants*. African elephants live only in Africa south of the Sahara. Indian elephants live in parts of India and South east Asia.

Elephants are extremely strong and highly intelligent. People have tamed and trained them for thousands of years. The logging industry in some Asian countries uses elephants to carry heavy loads. People throughout the world enjoy watching elephants in circuses and zoos. Trained circus elephants stand on their heads, lie down and roll over, dance, and perform other tricks.

One of the earliest recorded uses of elephants took place in war. In 341 B.C., a Macedonian army led by Alexander the Great defeated Persian soldiers who rode elephants in battle. In 218 B.C., the famous general Hannibal of Carthage used elephants when he crossed the Alps and invaded Italy.

During the 1800's, an African elephant named Jumbo was featured by the London Zoo for more than 17 years.

Cynthia Moss, the contributor of this article, is Director of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project and senior associate of the African Wildlife Foundation in Nairobi, Kenya. She is the author of portraits in the Wild, Elephant Memories, and editor of The Elephants.

Visitors came from all parts of the world to see Jumbo, the largest animal in captivity at that time. He stood 11 feet (3.4 meters) tall and weighed more than 14,500 pounds (6,600 kilograms). In 1882, the American showman P. T. Barnum purchased Jumbo and made the elephant a star attraction of his circus. The word *jumbo* became a common adjective for anything extremely large.

Some people travel to Africa and parts of Asia to see wild elephants in their own environment. However, the number of wild elephants has been steadily declining because people kill elephants for their ivory tusks. In addition, people have settled on much of the land where the animals lived, resulting in a loss of habitat for the elephants. Farming and industry threaten the natural resources needed by elephants to survive. In Asia, human population growth has reduced the number of elephants to between 35,000 and 51,000. In Africa, the main cause of the decline in elephants is illegal hunting. In 1979, an estimated 1,300,000 elephants lived in Africa. In the early 1990's, there were only about 600,000.

A public awareness campaign was launched in the late 1980's to save the African elephant. People throughout the world were made aware that thousands of elephants were being slaughtered every year to provide ivory jewelry and carvings. Japan was the greatest consumer of ivory. The Japanese used half the ivory that they imported for signature seals, traditional carved stamps used to print their names in ink. It was estimated that 12,000 elephants were killed each year to obtain ivory for these seals.

The importance of elephants

Wild elephants perform several important natural functions. For example, they help turn densely wooded areas into more open areas by feeding on trees and