

THE HEART OF THE ELEPHANT

A GLOBAL SERIES

TRUST

LOVE

JOY

FORGIVENESS

FAMILY





*“There is mystery behind that masked gray visage,
and ancient life force, delicate and mighty, awesome
and enchanted, commanding the silence ordinarily
reserved for mountain peaks, great fires,
and the sea.”*

-Peter Matthiessen



Those of us who have had the privilege of looking deep into the eyes of an elephant, feeling their low rumbles reverberate through to our very core, will attest to the fact that somewhere, buried deep in history, there is an ancient connection between man and elephant. It is more than the instinctual fear between hunter and hunted - rather a recognition of a kindred spirit.

In the past, humans believed that our empathy and conscience are what set us apart from other animals but the growing body of evidence, collected from across the world, proves just how very wrong we were.

The Heart of the Elephant is a story of wonder, woven together from a tapestry of eye-witness accounts and scientific research of these gentle giants' intelligence and undeniable emotional capacity that is far more powerful than we ever acknowledged.

It is a story not just about the love and trust they feel towards members of their own species but also their ability to express forgiveness towards humans who prove they are deserving of it.



The bond between an Elephant mother and her calf is one of the strongest in the animal kingdom. But when tragedy strikes and a baby loses its mother – it’s a trauma the calf carries for life. And no one is better equipped to help in this situation than the team at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. “Being orphaned is a profoundly traumatic event, both physically and psychologically, and many orphans suffer from starvation, dehydration or injuries caused by predators or humans. Our rescue teams are equipped with milk, stretchers to carry the orphan and vital medicines, including drips, to offer immediate aid at the scene and during the rescue.” This delicate task of rescuing orphans and raising them to go back to the wild is a not for the weak.

Their Keepers play a crucial role in supporting and nurturing the orphans as their lost mothers' would have done. They offer them unconditional love, emotional support and the learning experiences that each young elephant needs to grow, as they would have received from their absent mothers. The Keepers care for the orphans 24 hours a day and this includes sleeping with the orphans during the night in their individual stockades on a rotational basis so they do not feel alone.

Strong bonds between mother and calf are not limited to African Elephants. In the jungles of Thailand a young elephant was separated from its mother and sold to an elephant-back tourism company. After four years of abuse the young Elephant’s health started to decline. Conservationist Lek Chailert stepped in and took the calf to her elephant rehabilitation centre. Lek discovered that the young Elephant’s mother was at a reserve nearby. Once reunited the two Elephants recognized each other immediately after 10 years – it was a joyful and emotional experience for both mother and baby – from that day on the two have been inseparable.



When Lek Chailert rescued an elephant named Faa Sai from a circus in Thailand it took plenty of love and dedication to teach the elephant not only how to be an elephant again but how to live a life free of chains. Several years later Lek's approach to heal the Elephant with love has paid off and Faa Sai freely roams the vast grounds of Lek's Sanctuary as a wild elephant. Today, Lek and Faa Sai still share an inseparable bond "We have to make them feel that this is a safe place for them. Trust is the first thing that we have to earn."

Amidst a climate of political unrest and civil war, American conservationist Andrea Turkalo dedicated the past 30 years of her life to studying the forest Elephants of Dzanga Bai in the Central African Republic. She has catalogued over 4000 elephants and closely monitored their intricate social behaviours. She has seen Elephants form strong connections and friendships within family groups as well as with Elephants from different herds. During her years in the field she was able to identify every single Elephant in Dzanga Bai and monitor their personal interactions with the other elephants in the area. Through this she witnessed how elephants express emotions on a deeply intense level - from love and joy to loss and sorrow.

Before the outbreak of the Angolan Civil War in 1975, the country was home to over 200,000 elephants. When the war ended in 2002 – conservationists were eager to carry out a census to determine how many Elephants remained. The data collected showed a devastating loss with only 350 elephants counted in total. But in recent years, elephants are starting to make a comeback. It seems that even after years of heavy poaching the Elephants somehow know that Angola is now safe. The latest census in 2015 showed over 3600 Elephants in Angola, considered one of the greatest conservation success stories of the past 50 years.



“We admire elephants in part because they demonstrate what we consider the finest human traits: empathy, self-awareness, and social intelligence.

But the way we treat them puts on display the very worst of human behavior.”

-Graydon Carter

FAMILY FIRST



Conducting research on elephants is vital to their conservation, since it helps us to understand their behavior, resource requirements and responses to changing environmental conditions.

NVS Productions has **exclusive** access to some of the leading scientists, veterinarians, researchers and conservationists in Africa and Asia. By following and filming their studies, we are able to scientifically dissect the emotions and film firsthand the undocumented discoveries, new treatments and incredible conservation victories made for the species across the globe. These stories will be the scientific backbone to the film, proving to us that these are truly incredible, emotional creatures that deserve our respect and protection.

India just opened its first hospital specifically dedicated to helping elephants. Although elephants are a fundamental part of Indian culture, many are exploited for tourist attractions, used in festival parades, and forced to perform. Opening last summer in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the hospital is taking a stand against this, working to preserve the animals by caring for injured, sick, and geriatric elephants. The 12,000 square foot hospital is well-equipped, boasting wireless digital X-ray, thermal imaging, ultrasonography, tranquilization devices, and quarantine facilities. But this facility is also offering PTSD care, emotional support for elephants that have been mistreated, abused and have lost their family and herds.

By bringing lone elephants into these sanctuaries, there is hope that the elephants can find compassion for one another, soothe each other and form the important bonds that are at the root of elephant behavior, *the bonds of family*. Like humans, elephants are capable of forming very special bonds with their friends and family members. These relationships start at the core of the herd, i.e. mother and calf. But, they radiate out, and there have been astounding reports of lifelong bonds between elephants that have transcended time and even distance apart.

Elephants value their family structure, perhaps more so than many other animals. They are naturally outgoing, sociable animals and, as such, enjoy the interaction with fellow family- and herd members. Although structured, the herd is fluid enough to compensate for unforeseen circumstances (such as the death of one of the mothers, where other mothers allow the orphaned calf to suckle). Such ties are rare, and the empathetic and insightful nature of these magnificent animals continues to lure researchers deeper and deeper into the elephant psyche.

FORGIVENESS & JOY



Sangduen "Lek" Chailert is known in Thailand and throughout the world as "the elephant whisperer." What people are exposed to early in their lives can have an impact on their future endeavors. Lek grew up with a love of animals, to the point where she was ridiculed for spending time with them. When she was 16, she saw elephants being abused at a logging camp, and she felt compelled to change the way humans and animals interact with each other. She came to the realization that elephants have a right to be on this planet and to not be exploited for human entertainment or profit. She then exposed to the tourist trade, a vital income for Thailand, the Crush Box, the centuries old training to break an elephant's spirit in order to ride or work. Lek founded the Elephant Nature Park in 1996, where elephants live safe and free. Lek employs some people who once abused these beautiful animals and have learned by her example how to care for them with appreciation and respect. Deep in the jungles of Chiang Mai, we get up close and personal with the Lek and her rescued elephants.

Jokia is a female elephant who born at a Karen village along the Burmese border. Her name means 'Eye From Heaven'. During her younger days the Karen family used her to work in the logging trade in order to make money to support their family. At that time she was two months pregnant but later lost her baby in an accident. She suffered a miscarriage while pulling a log uphill, and was not allowed to stop working to check if her calf was dead or alive. This event caused Jokia extreme physical and emotional trauma, and she refused to go back to work. As a result, she was deliberately blinded in both eyes on two separate occasions by two different owners.

Luckily Jokia was rescued by Lek and upon her first arrival, Jokia was clearly delighted when she found that there is a big river to bathe everyday. She started her new life living with good care from her mahout who watches over her and assists with anything she needs help. Despite her blindness, she moves confidently with the help of her best friend, Mae Perm. Jokia and Mae Perm have been best friends since 1999. They have the longest friendship in the ENP. "Unfortunately, Mae Perm passed away in April 2016 and brought a lot of sadness to Jokia. We found it is so difficult to take Mae Perm body to bury, because Jokia stood to protect her and would not let us to take the body of her best friend away. When we managed that she shown such grief crying and moaning all the time. During that hard time we followed her every where she move to be ensure for her safety, as she tried to hurt herself."

Although Jokia faced a lot of sadness, she lost her baby, she lost her best friend but she never let the pain of her past stop her from forgiving and forging new friendships.

TRUST & UNDERSTANDING



“Converting scientific concepts into narrative stories helps me see patterns in nature that I hadn’t realized were there.

It also helps bring a fantastical character to life that has gotten under my skin and won’t stop itching until I reveal its true nature to others...” Dr. Caitlin O’Connell

Elephants of the Mushara area of Etosha National Park have been monitored at several different levels to better understand their social structure, communication and health in order to apply this knowledge to improved care in captivity and ultimately to elephant conservation in the wild. Dr. Caitlin O’Connell at Utopia Scientific has been heading up this study for 15 years, and for the first time, is allowing NVS Productions to document her important discoveries and witness the forefront of Elephant science.

Utopia Scientific scientists are looking into questions relating to long term memory, general cognitive ability and evidence of psychological states that resemble human emotion in these long lived, highly social large mammals. Until recently, emotion was a term that referred solely to humans. Now, scientists are looking for non-human models of emotion in order to better understand our own emotions.

Cognitive functions, such as perception, attention, learning, memory, and motor control, are all influenced by emotion. Understanding the interaction between cognitive processing and emotion in other intelligent species, such as elephants, may provide clues to human medical disorders, such as autism, depression and addictions. Their other long-term goal is to investigate the role that the propagation and detection of vibrations play in communication and environmental eavesdropping in large mammals, using the elephant as a non-human animal model for both the hearing, hearing impaired, autistic and the profoundly deaf. The crew follows the daily experiments covered by Dr. Caitlin and her scientists, learning the names of the elephants she knows so well. We get a glimpse into the work it takes to really understand the Heart of the Elephant.

In the desert of North Namibia, amongst these gentle desert giants, we may uncover the secrets to our own humanity.

THE TEAM

VANESSA BOSHOFF

Award winning writer, producer and on-screen talent, Vanessa has been making wildlife films since high school in her backyard of Yellowstone. As she grew up, her backyard just got bigger, to include most of the planet. She has filmed and worked across the globe, from tagging hammerhead sharks in Cocos Island to camping with lemurs in Madagascar, and filming her favorite animal, the elephant in Asia and Africa.

Her passion for animals and wild spaces drives her to tell these stories and speak for those who have no voice.

www.amothersearth.com



NEL BOSHOFF

Emmy Award winning Cinematographer

Nel grew up in South Africa, and moved to the USA for film school. He has worked on numerous documentaries and Hollywood films, but his true passion is capturing the wilderness with the best technology. Nel has over 4000 hours logged filming from a helicopter, and specializes in stabilized aerials, both drones and full size aircrafts. He is driven to capture the perfect shot, and will do what it takes to get it.

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