



Mission Elephant

Follow me from Hong Kong to Africa and learn more about the future and challenges facing elephants.



- Hong Kong: 800 smuggled elephant tusks seized last August. Bangkok: 1 tonne of ivory stopped last month. All from Africa. (Mar 28)

<http://news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20110904-297673.html>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/25/smuggled-african-ivory-se_n_828121.html



Elephants need us. Do you know <http://www.awely.org/en/program/the-red-caps/zambia?>



Flying soon to Botswana and Burkina Faso. Reality, shocking details and more positive actions. Be all ears!





Still on my long flight to Botswana where I am going to meet Jabu, my best elephant informant friend! It takes a while for a little sparrow like me to cross the world! You are going to love Jabu!

And soon after I will be off to Burkina Faso with my friend Julien Marchais from the NGO **Des Elephants & des Hommes** (<http://deselephantsetdeshommes.org/english/index.html>). This pachyderm specialist is going to tell me more about his remarkable project. Let's see how we can help him!



Botswana

Flying over the Okavango Delta is a delight to the eyes. Breathtaking Botswana! The countryside is simply extraordinary. Rays of sunlight dance on the water to create fireworks of reflections, each more astonishing than the last. Animals are everywhere in this giant swamp. And there, on the horizon, my destination: Elephant Island.



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Elephant Island, Botswana

It didn't take me long to find Jabu. He is the biggest elephant in the area! What mass! I love flying, but on the ground I feel really tiny (logical, since I am tiny!). Jabu is the best elephant ambassador. With his elephant friends, Thembi and Morula, he lives at www.livingwiththeelephants.org where he is in human contact with those who rescued him as an orphaned baby almost 25 years ago. It is also because of this that he is a wealth of information on the elephant situation in Africa.





Elephant Island, Botswana

Botswana is an elephant paradise and home to the largest elephant population in Africa, but the situation is not as rosy elsewhere. Before talking seriously with Jabu, we are going to play a bit. I love diving into his trunk so that he can blow me out. Too much fun! Jabu has a huge heart and the elephant situation in Africa (and Asia as well) worries him. At the end of February and March of this year, at least 500 elephants were massacred at Bouba Ndjida National Park in Cameroon. Why? I will let the photo answer...





Elephant Island, Botswana

Yes, the animals were massacred for their ivory tusks which were then shipped to Asia, notably China, to be transformed into decorative objects or jewellery. The big sad eyes of my friend Jabu say everything about his distress. After a lull, these past years have been terrible. A bit everywhere, elephants and rhinoceros have been easy victims for consistently better equipped poachers. Kenya has also seen numerous massacres. Ask Ian Douglas-Hamilton at www.savetheelephants.org. Ninety-five percent of Liberia's elephants have been decimated. Region after region, country after country, elephants are disappearing because of the demand for ivory.





Elephant Island, Botswana

It's time to leave. I thank Jabu for all his information and have a bit more fun with him and my feathered friends, the francolins, before departing. Direction Burkina Faso in West Africa to meet Julien and www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org, to the heart of a passionate project. One last trumpeting from Jabu, trunk in the air, and I am on my way across Africa.





Boromo, Burkina Faso

The vegetation is a huge contrast from the swampy Okavango Delta of Botswana. Burkina Faso is a country threatened from the North by the advancement of the desert. It is also a country of enormous rivers, and the Boucle du Mouhoun Region, where I arrive, is a forested region as beautiful as it is threatened, bordering the Mouhoun River (Black Volta). There is Julian waving at me, as always super friendly and relaxed. We have a thousand things to talk about, but first, I must make a short detour by the village school to say hi to my little friends.





Boromo, Burkina Faso

A few seeds for breakfast and here I am in full conversation with my good friend Julien. Here, in Burkina Faso, elephants are threatened more by habitat destruction than by poaching. In West Africa, elephant populations are very fragmented, rendering them more fragile. There are no corridors between the different forests where they live so movement is limited.

The NGO Des Elephants & des Hommes (www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org) actively works on the edge of Deux Balés National Park in an attempt to preserve this rapidly receding forest that is also being invaded by neighbouring farmers' livestock. Lions, hyenas, buffalo, certain antelope, and many other animals have already disappeared from the park. Let's take a tour!





Deux-Bales National Park, Burkina Faso

There are our elephant friends, majestic as always. I find them a bit different than those in Botswana, which makes sense since West African elephants could very well be a sub-species. One more reason to save them! The elephant population here is estimated to be approximately 300.

Coexistence with humans is difficult. As is often the case in Africa and Asia, habitat destruction pushes elephants to traverse agricultural regions that were once their forests. In a country as poor as Burkina Faso, harvest destruction causes serious problems for farmers who often see elephants as vermin capable of annihilating their meagre revenue at any moment. They do not realize that by destroying the forest and an often unique local ecosystem, the entire ecology of the region is affected by, for example, reduced rainfall and soil erosion that can be catastrophic in the middle term. Let's cross the river and return to the village!





Boromo, Burkina Faso

Today I have a meeting with my little friends Fatoumata and Abdoulaye. They have never seen an elephant, but they know they are dangerous and they are afraid of them. Last year their parents' field was destroyed one night by a herd of elephants. Elephants are like monsters for them. Since, thanks to the activities of Julien (www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org) and local organisations, their village has organised and more closely monitors elephant movement. Their parents have also accepted to reduce their herd of cows and have started raising cane rats, which lessens their impact on the park, leaving more space to the elephants in their natural environment. Soon the village will take up bee-keeping to produce a speciality honey that the habitants will be able to sell for a good price. What other way to intelligently protect himself?





Boromo, Burkina Faso

The children passed on a secret... elephants hate hot pepper too. Jabu affirmed this. The plan is to plant hot peppers around farms and to hang them along fences. Des Elephants & des Hommes (www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org) is full of interesting ideas. They understand that to help reduce conflicts with elephants and the environment, it is necessary to help the people living close to Deux Balés National Park have an economic and social interest in preserving their region. If not, elephants will be killed and there will be no forests left. Revenue generating activities are the future of successful conservation and I fully support these logical initiatives. Controlled eco-tourism could also be a sustainable solution. Thanks kids, and see you on Monday in class!





Boromo, Burkina Faso

It's a big day. "To protect, it is necessary to understand." Julien told me yesterday and he is definitely right. He conceived the story "My Elephant Neighbour" in which the grandmother of a young Noa explains why it is necessary to protect elephants and how Man's destiny and that of elephants is tightly linked. A beautiful story and this morning we are going to distribute the books illustrated by Eco-Sys Action (www.ecosysaction.org/fr) of which I am the very proud ambassador. I have also shared this story with you at <http://www.ecosysaction.org/boopys-blog>. Djénéba, the project coordinator, is also here to help.

What excitement! The kids are super happy and they are finally going to be able to better understand who these big-eared monsters living in the neighbouring forest really are. I am going to leave them to read this wonderful story in peace and we will meet up here again at the same time tomorrow morning.





Boromo, Burkina Faso

The night was short and Julien and I talked a lot about the children, their reaction, and the impact this book could have on the future of elephants in the Boucle du Mouhoun region. There are 160 primary classes who will soon receive these books and the objective is to distribute them in 360 schools. Thousands of children will benefit from this educational and interactive tool since it is accompanied by teachers' resource material.

What a welcome upon our arrival at the school! The kids are excited, they have a million questions, commentary, ideas about the book "My Elephant Neighbour." It is great to see them so happy. The monster, the elephant, is now a neighbour that they respect and want to help. Today Djénéba and Julien have a big surprise for them: tomorrow, the entire class is going to see elephants in the Deux Balés forest! The kids dance, sing and scream with joy! See you tomorrow for an awe-inspiring outing!





Deux Balés National Park, Burkina Faso

Despite their excitement, my little friends are quiet today. They know know they must not make noise which would frighten the elephants. Calmly, they get off the bus to walk to the river, hoping to catch a glimpse of their famous “elephant neighbours.” The river is calm, not an animal on the horizon. Then suddenly, one of the children can't hold back a half-stifled cry. “Look!” he says to me. Yes! One, then two, then dozens of elephants come out of the river as if by magic and loll about. What a show! The children can't believe their eyes. Their smiles say everything of their joy of discovering this extraordinary animal. They are hypnotized by these giants. The baby elephants are also a huge success. In a low voice, Djénéba explains the elephants' social structure, which is not that different from our own. Their intelligence as well. The children are astonished. They never would have suspected that this fascinating elephant world existed right next to their own. It is the discovery of their lifetime.....

It is time to leave now, but what an incredible day!







Boromo, Burkina Faso

Today I must leave, but not without passing by the school. The children had extraordinary dreams, beautiful dreams. Today I hear a child say, “my elephant friends.” The monster with the huge ears no longer exists and these children have become highly motivated ambassadors to their families and friends. For more than ten years Julien and www.deselephantsetdeshommes.org have brought over 3000 children to see the elephants and the mentality is changing in the Boucle du Mouhoun Region, also encouraged by different revenue generating projects that have been progressively put in place. It is necessary to save the forest!

I have also brought some good news for Julien. Eco-Sys Action (www.ecosysaction.org/fr) has decided to finance the training of several people to the valorization of the medicinal plants of Deux Balés forest. These tradi-practitioners will learn to better collect, condition, and market the medicinal plants of the forest. The forest is then transformed into an enormous pharmacy that is vital to preciously protect.

See you soon friends and BOOPY POWER!





Africa (by flight)

I am now flying to India for new adventures in the country of gibbons, but I would like to leave you with the story “My Elephant Neighbour” in Chinese so you can pass it on to your friends in China. If Chinese children discover who elephants are, perhaps they will ask their families to stop buying ivory. This will make Jabu and the rest of his elephant friends very happy! There are only 8000 elephants left in West Africa, in fact 7500 after the most recent massacres in Cameroon this year! Don't hesitate to share this document with everyone you know, the story in Chinese can be found at <http://www.ecosysaction.org/boopys-blog>.

Thanks and see you soon!