

**ELEART**

**A JOURNEY OF  
ELEPHANTS AND ART**

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**MARIA JOÃO CASTRO**



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# ÍNDICE

## Preface

*John Parkington* 12  
*Ian Harmer* 13

Elephant Memory; a short note 14  
Initial Movement 15

## INSPIRATION

In the Beginning was Art 17  
The Children of the Wind 18

## CREATION

Life, *Musth* and Death 24  
Keen Senses 26  
African Footprints 32  
    Addo 32  
    The Kalahari 32  
    Okavango Delta 33  
    Elephant Sands 34  
    South Luangwa 34  
    Gorongosa 35

## EXHIBITION

Iconography 39  
Footprints in Portugal 43  
The Circus and the Zoo 46  
Illegal Trade 47  
Traces of Art 49  
    South Africa 50  
    Namibia 51  
    Botswana 51  
    Zimbabwe 51

## ECHOES

Tourism 53  
Animal Conservation 55  
Cultural Conservation 62  
The Spirit of San Art 63  
Perpetual Travellers 65

Final Movement 70

Acknowledgements 71  
Endnotes 72  
Selected Bibliography 74



**THE JOURNEY TRANSFORMS US**

**AS THE PATH UNFOLDS**

# PREFACE

**JOHN PARKINGTON**

*Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town*

*South Africa*

Cynthia Moss, a well-known biologist of Africa, began one of her books with an intriguing but enigmatic outline of the lifeways of her chosen species. She described its life expectancy, about 70 years, its patent sociality and close family structure, its high intelligence and complex capacity to communicate over great distances. Only revealing later that she was talking elephants not people, she was hinting at a close similarity between elephants and people, a belief in fact that elephants were ‘other than human people’. This confidence in the ‘humanity’ of the great iconic African mammal is shared with the hunter gatherer people of Southern Africa, the San foragers, once widespread across and sole occupants of the subcontinent south of the Zambesi and Cunene rivers.

San hunters almost certainly never actively hunted elephants as the pachyderms were seen as dangerous, their skins too thick for the San arrows to penetrate. No aspirant hunter was expected to kill an elephant to demonstrate their hunting skills: rather aim for an eland or a hartebeest. But perhaps this was also because they perceived the largest of terrestrial mammals to be too human — their flesh tasted ‘like a person’s’, they became drunk on fermented marula fruits, female breasts were positioned toward the forelegs as were women’s, they

remembered dead relatives after death and, probably crucially, elephants were clearly family based and socially coherent societies. Amongst San groups people told stories about when elephants were people and often included elephants as in-laws, not always in tales with happy endings. In short, whilst hunting and gathering San came into contact with elephants regularly, perhaps daily, shared water pools and pathways with them and treated them with respect.

In her writing of *EleArt*, Maria João Castro reflects this extraordinary, complex, intimate and only now emerging relationship between two of Africa’s most prominent species — people and elephants. As she notes, elephants in many parts of Africa have become extinct and survive, as in the Cederberg Mountains of the Cape, only as painted images. The details of the paintings, however, reveal some of the intimacies, some of the respect and some of the conflicts of this inter-specific relationship. Our first narrative of the meetings and interactions of Southern African San and elephants comes from a journal written by soldiers travelling north from Africa’s nascent colony at the Cape in 1661, when Soaqua, as the hunter gatherers came to be called before they became San, showed the colonial travellers how to traverse the landscape following elephant paths. Elephants were

all across the valleys. Tragically, barely 100 years later both Soaqua and elephant had gone, eliminated or incorporated by the growing greedy colony.

Maria João Castro correctly identifies the art, in this case hundreds of evocative rock paintings of elephants made by Soaqua artists, as an abiding memory of these pre-colonial relationships, linkages of people or persons of different forms, we would say different species. Lines of obvious matriarch-led elephants, paintings of therianthropie elephant-people, depictions of social and life history moments in elephant, Soaqua and in some cases both, existences. These landscapes, as others have said, are palimpsests of accumulated memories, captured by painters and fixed in places of mutually significant meaning. The tragedy is that the lives and practices of both painter and painted were irreconcilably juxtaposed with the greedy, acquisitive and destructive preferences of colonial

## IAN HARMER

*Specialist in Conservation and Wildlife in Zimbabwe*

I was born and brought up in the bush in Zimbabwe and have spent my life working with wildlife. I spent my childhood searching for Bushman paintings and gazing in wonder upon their discovery, contemplating what they were trying to tell me. Growing older, I have had the privilege of working with the Bushmen and learning some of their ways, which has left me even

society. The wonder is that we still have the art to view and to use in contemplation of our own historical impacts.

Maria João Castro mentions the despicable practice of placing not only elephants but also Soaqua and related people in circuses and zoos where they could be ogled by an ignorant European community, a «less wise *Homo sapiens*», unaware of what destruction they were witnessing. This essay, evocatively entitled *EleArt*, is a sensitive account of an ontologically rich relationship that has become, in places, available only in painted form. As she says, if the Soaqua, and we might add the elephants, «are the mirror through which we measure our own achievements», it is not a pretty image that is configured in the present, in the certainty that this book contributes to inspiring altruistic actions capable of a full and responsible enjoyment of true commitment to the natural world and heritage of which we are heirs.

more in awe of these people and their oneness with the environment.

This book is a beautiful explanation of the symbiosis between the Bushmen and elephants, and nature as a whole, with the author being able to encapsulate in words the rare connection between Humans and Wildlife, for which I congratulate her. I hope everybody enjoys this work as much as I have.

# ELEPHANT MEMORY; A SHORT NOTE

The so-called «elephant memory», one of the species' most outstanding traits, is based on their ability to preserve memories over decades. In line with such elephant recollections, this book aims to bring together the contemporary experience of these animals and the artistic record made of them by the oldest people in the world. Hence, the proposed text focuses on Africa although it also considers a broader, more global perspective.

The justification for writing this book is the result of a passion split between the San people, the nomadic Bushmen, and the largest land mammal, with the approach to both being based on the dual pillars of Art and Travel, physically as well as emotionally. After years of wandering around the world and immersing myself in inclusive readings and eclectic research, EleArt was designed with an increasingly specific outline even if it did not always complete the desired picture. Along elephant trails and in caves containing millennial rock art, this journey was defined by moments of pure magic, incredulity, apprehension and expectation with the promise of a fleeting survival in a tribute to life.

We know that the art of living (surviving) is common to all living beings; we also know that art as pictorial representation is exclusive to humans, the highest expression of a sensitivity that enables moments, experiences and practices to endure. And it is also known that both the San and elephants (among other

species) have been ostracised, persecuted and decimated in the name of interests that are increasingly pernicious and difficult to justify.

However, this text is not intended to point the finger or apportion blame; rather, this reflection is intended to help draw attention to an inescapable reality: if we do nothing, if we allow actions that destroy the life and heritage of the planet to go ahead, we will succumb. The data revealing the impact of our civilisation on nature shows the pressing need stemming from such actions and there are already some fatally critical situations that cannot be reversed. Hence, we opted to undertake some basic research, later discussed with peers, which was then brought together in a synthesis that led to the narrative the reader now holds in their hands, a kind of travel chronicle from an authorial perspective.

In fact, my immense affection for and gratitude to both elephants and the San people comes from the luminous intensity they radiate in line with António Damásio's thought that «we should think of affection as the universe of our ideas translated into feeling». Something of another kind happens when we find ourselves in the presence of these two identities, something that transforms them into catalysts for goodwill and communion that adheres to the skin like a precious tattoo. And this oneiric vibration surrounds us and becomes part of who we are, staying with us until it dissolves, forever, in the fleetingness of time...

# INITIAL MOVEMENT

As dawn appears, the scene lights up exposing the horizon and pushing back the night. Vast and promising, the clarity of the new day reveals a silhouette on a distant plane. I move closer. The majestic adult animal is feeding on a bush. It senses my presence before seeing me and interrupts its meal to look at me. Having ascertained there is no danger involved, it goes back to eating. Its peacefulness calms me and I stay there for what seems like an infinity of minutes in pure contemplation.

Time seems to pass so slowly yet when I look the morning has long since set in. At that very moment, the elephant turns its trunk towards me and freezes. It has smelt me. It stares at me one last time and then is gone. The grace with which it departs touches me and, grateful, I start the jeep's engine and drive off.

# INSPIRATION



## IN THE BEGINNING WAS ART

The row of elephants in ochre and crimson tones together with some stylised human figures outlined in black are a matchstick scratching of light in the darkness of humanity. The depth of the design, the symbolism emanating from it condenses all the beauty of the world and independently of what such creation means — warriors alongside a group of elephants — it shows a plastic reverence for the largest terrestrial mammal, a tribute to its gentleness and ability. Simple and vivid, the paintings reveal a millennial artistic treasure drawn on igneous rock by the oldest people in the world, who, in representing an animal, believed they could embody its power. Indeed, how beautiful they are... because beauty is the harmony of things before the senses, a subjective quality, the colour with which truth is tinted.<sup>1</sup>

Outside, the golden yellow of the rising light, tingeing the rocky outcrop, lends it an ethereal religiosity. Against the blue of the sky, those silhouettes contain something genuine and timeless — a creative essence — which makes them a primordial source of Art for Art's sake, of fulfilment and human elevation.

If art is a vehicle for spiritual elevation, in Africa — the continent where human beings «rose up onto their feet» — artistic creation is not reduced to mere plastic antiquity but is anchored in the underlying mystique of the people who instantiated it through a poetics that is remarkable on all levels. It is the root of so-called 'primitive' African art, and contemporary art is the direct heir to this because the drawings traced on the rock walls of Africa

are living icons that enter into dialogue with those willing to listen to them.

In fact, cave paintings are the oldest form of storytelling and the San, a people without a written tradition, elevated this to a fine art by condensing their experiences through pictorial records.

There is a rather eclectic and diffuse corpus of research in the area that has been consolidated and strengthened in studies which provide the true dimension of this extraordinary plastic production. The pioneering *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* by W.H.I. Bleek, published in 1911, introduced Bushman culture and their myths and legends through which they interpreted the natural world, but it took until 1959, when the writer Elizabeth Marshall published *The Harmless People*, for there to be a narrative available resulting from actual experience in the field. Along the way were the «classic» works of Laurens Van Der Post, *The Lost World of the Kalahari* (1958), *The Heart of the Hunter* (1961) and *A Story Like the Wind* written a decade later, narratives whose value stems from the lyrical fantasy that emerges from them with their almost mystical tendency, albeit they contain specific factual errors. It would be necessary to wait until the 1970s to have access to more rigorous research into San culture and art with the establishment of the Rock Art Research Institute (RARI) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. The first volume studying San art prepared with the rigour characteristic of an academic volume dates from 1976: *People of the Eland* by Patricia Vinnicombe, republished in 2001 under the title *People of the Eland. Rock Paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of their*

*Life and Thought*. Under the coordination of David Lewis-Williams, RARI published *The Rock Art of Southern Africa* (1983), followed by *A Cosmos in Stone: Interpreting Religion and Society Through Rock Art* (2002), *Images of Mystery: Rock Art of Drakensberg* (2003) and *The Mind in the Cave* (2004). For this essay it is also of interest to refer to the research undertaken by Peter Garlake in *The Hunter's Vision, The Prehistoric Art of Zimbabwe* (1995), John Parkington *The Mantis, the Eland and the Hunter: Follow the San* (2002) and *Cederberg Rock Painting* (2003) as well as the book *Bushman Rock Art: an Interpretative Guide* by Tim Forssman and Lee Gutteridge (2012). The Trust For African Rock Art (TARA)<sup>2</sup> has also published a range of valid information such as *The Dawn of Imagination. Rock Art in Africa* and *The Future of Africa's Past*.

## THE CHILDREN OF THE WIND

Once upon a time in Dqae Qare, near Ghanzi in Botswana...

While the clarity of dawn had not yet swept away the night, the small man approached. He put down his bow and arrow and wrapped me in a hug as his face lit up in a gentle smile. He had a scrawny but muscular look, with friendly eyes mirroring an innocence that matched his frail appearance. I do not remember his name, but I cannot forget the impression he made on me as he snuggled his thin body against mine. It was an almost childish embrace, of an unlikely purity. His skin was soft, a walnut-coloured brown, and his body was short, lean and muscular, covered in a mixture of western clothes and leathery animal skins. I stared at his profile with its timeless Asiatic features. His air was more

There is also a vast bibliography on elephants, the subject of study in recent ground-breaking works such as *The Last Elephants* by Don Pinnock and Colin Bell (2019) or the prophetic *The End of the Game: The Last Word from Paradise* by Peter Beard, dated 1963 and republished in 2008, just to name two written works that are true founding texts on these giants. There are also many others of a specialised or wide-ranging nature.

There is undoubtedly a prolific genealogy both on Bushman art — and the San in particular — as well as on elephants, but there is no text that synthesises the poetics shared between the oldest people in the world and the largest land mammal, both endangered species, and it is this gap that this book seeks to fill.

one of naughtiness rather than playfulness along with a candour that was beyond reproach and a keen eye that seemed to reach into the very heart of things. It was noticeable that he was always focused, never distracted — one could say precise and never vague. He leaned on a stick and was deeply spiritual. He had had no school education; however, he was a wise man as I would come to realise. His nobility in sharing part of his way of life moved me and, without knowing why, I felt ashamed.

There was time to talk and there was time to take notes but, above all, there was time to listen. His wife was translating his speech filled with clicks, laughing at the theatricality of his expressions, following him through the bush with her light steps.

I learnt how they master botany,

taxonomy and the poisons from plants, knowledge of which makes them expert hunters, that they live in small nuclei, that the women gather fruit, roots, insects and small animals, provide wood for the fire while the men go out to hunt, using bows and arrows, sticks and traps. When they kill an animal, they apologise to it and thank it by explaining how much their families need it. They use everything and there is no waste: they eat the meat and drink the blood; they make clothes from the skin and build arrows and spears from the bones.

The main rule is one of solidarity. Everyone takes care of the children, the elderly and the sick, and war is unknown. They do not harbour any sense of possession or violence, no laws or guilt; they have no writing, no roots or continuations; they are unaware of concepts such as competition and all their efforts are focused on the present, without thinking of the future or the past: they have the *here* and the *now* and that is everything because that instant is all that exists. They lead a (semi-)nomadic life, moving from one place to another, with almost no possessions, keeping nothing, demanding nothing with the dignity and innocence of those who choose to *be* instead of to *have*, and they never take anything for granted.

At the end of the tour through the grass, he rolled a stick between his palms, rubbing its end against a soft piece of wood. It did not take long before a small wisp of smoke appeared, which was quickly blown and produced a small flame. I wondered to what extent this was all just a farce, a tourist attraction, a simulacrum of a former life. Then he lifted his face and smiled at me and I couldn't help but believe that his expression was honest.

The air was imbued with an invisible

current. High above, weightless clouds swept across the ever-changing sky. It was time to leave.

As I drove away, the dirt road grew smaller and smaller as I distanced myself from the magic that I stubbornly believed still inhabited Dqae Qare.

Formerly the Bushmen or *Khoisan*<sup>3</sup> — a sub-Saharan ethnolinguistic group — inhabited a territory so vast that it stretched from Sudan to the Cape of Good Hope. According to scientists, the San are the world's oldest people, although there is not enough data to determine the possibly multiple footpaths of the world expansion of human modernity.

Their extinction began with the Bantu tribes 1500 years ago, continued with the Dutch colonists in the 17th century and was perpetuated by the independence governments. They were dominated, enslaved and decimated.

Nowadays, their communities are confined to the Kalahari desert, and tiny patches in Botswana and Angola for a very specific reason, namely that the land they once inhabited hid a great abundance of diamonds which led to governments rushing in to take control of this unforeseen wealth. In addition, the creation of game reserves — first for settlers and then for tourists — has driven them off their properties, which are now bordered by electrified fences. Taken together, all these interests have pushed them into increasingly tiny and more inhospitable areas, that is, the lands that nobody wanted and where it is almost impossible to live. Many survive by cultivating small gardens or taking low-paid jobs on white people's estates to which they have been taken, often by force, involving servile labour

and ill-treatment that is not far removed from slavery. Others have been relocated in a controversial move that drove them into the suburbs, where they suffered unemployment and exploitation, then sinking into alcoholism. They abandoned their own language<sup>4</sup> and lost their meaning of life. Thousands have died. There are no written records and their history is only found in thousand-year-old cave paintings scattered all over sub-Saharan Africa.

The focal element in their paintings is dance, a central ritual of their beliefs.<sup>5</sup> In this trance ritual, the San believe they embody the power of the animals they evoke, hence the paintings referencing this. Indeed, the ‘people who dance’ — as they are also called — merit this label due to the fact that their trance rituals form the core element of their life and one of the particular aspects of their culture. This means it is important to understand that it is through dance that they express religion, medicine and cosmology. Through it they solve problems and relieve tensions within the community with the aim of restoring harmony, so dance is seen and felt as therapy for the group, not merely as individual enjoyment.

Today, San shamanic dance still survives in some parts of Africa — such as the Kalahari — but it tends to follow a standardised pattern rather than what its ancestral paintings show. The pattern is circular: the women sit around the fire in a close circle with their shoulders touching. They sing and clap their hands in an intricate rhythm which they believe contains power. Outside the perimeter of female bodies, the men dance making another distinct circle accentuating the rhythm of their dance by beating their feet on the ground in an action which makes the rattles tied to their

calves shake. Sacred and secular, the dance unfolds until the repetitive music causes them to enter into a kind of trance, inducing and altering their state of consciousness through intense concentration, focusing on the repetition of movement, the lengthening of the rhythm and hyperventilating in the form of a crescendo. In the ecstasy of prayer, the San believe that they abandon their bodies and travel to visit distant relatives and friends, receiving revelations from the gods and moving within the restricted world of the spirit of the cosmos.<sup>6</sup> What is undeniable is the fact that this dance of the San forms their most important religious ritual. It is impressive — not as a display to be discovered but due to the authenticity of its movement in which gesture develops and culminates in a purification of rare plastic beauty. One senses that, within its mythical world, the art of Terpsichore rediscovers its intrinsic power as was highlighted in the *Rite of Spring*, choreographed by Nijinsky and put to music by Stravinsky. Finding meaning in movements the centuries have stylised but without separating them from their essence is, by definition, pure magic.

However, these San rites do not explain their art, at least not directly. It is accepting of disparate interpretations and can be seen as a set of metaphors which the San explain in their own terms, not in an anthropological language. Repeatedly, art and spiritual experience merge into a language of signs only fully understood by those who have created it. We can touch its tangible substance but never penetrate within its definitively intangible essence.

There is no denying it: they have been a people victimised and brutalised throughout the centuries, expelled from their lands by European greed that has filled their history with black-and-white

cruelty, with no notion of how much this would impoverish their present and make their future sterile. Victims of racism and the economic interests of national governments, expelled from their lands which they have abandoned without confrontation, the San simply take their meagre possessions and move on, as one should in life, licking their wounds with an unparalleled dignity that reminds us of who we once were but have already forgotten. A people on the margins, who arrived here before all others and who, I hope, will remain in this place long after others have disappeared in a mixture of a romantic idea and divine justice, which will repair some of the hardships they have experienced in the last few centuries.

In the final analysis, the San are the mirror through which we measure our own achievements on an evolutionary scale that assigns us to a higher level. In this sense, the re-creation or staging of the *Noble Savage’s* way of life, illustrating a harmonious relationship between a people and their surrounding geography and reflecting pristine ways of life, only accentuates their misery even though it satiates a contaminated perverse curiosity.

What is certain is that the path of the San, pushed and corralled into increasingly small and more sterile spaces, is ever shorter. Even if their genetic history links them to one of the oldest peoples on the planet, closely connected to the human communities who once inhabited the Earth, that will not be enough to save them. They were millions, now they are less than 500 thousand but there is no consensus on the actual numbers. What is consensual is the fact that the San are facing an uncertain and bleak future, which has led them to abandon their pictorial

records out of desperation, or because of a curse, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the dominant contemporary culture. However, history has run its course; what remains is for us to enjoy what is left of this simple powerful aesthetic language, a true work of art, and follow on the trail of its plastic inspiration — wildlife.

# CREATION



The map of Africa is shaped like an elephant's ear whose pristine trails return us to the true essence of the place!

Africa is a land in constant transformation. The seasonal cycle turns timelessly and uninterruptedly: drought is followed by rain in an ancient cycle that shows how water can reanimate the thirsty soil. Feast and famine, abundance and abstinence. Water is the key; evaporated by the sky and absorbed by the land it is the source of life... and of death.

The footprints encrusted in the parched land are the silent testimonies to the season of the year, that of drought. A family of elephants are walking slowly in a line. They look exhausted and they are thin. A calf is limping. The matriarch keeps up a brisk pace as she senses the urgency of destiny. Suddenly, a flash rips through the leaden sky. Their trunks tremble and there is a moment of impasse before the trail is taken up once again. They continue walking with increasing effort. At a certain moment the leader stops and raises her trunk to smell the air and then starts the journey again as they approach a dry riverbed without any trace of the precious gift of water.

The rumble of thunder cuts through the silent landscape bringing false hopes. The first thunderstorms — instead of relieving the tension — increase it as they set off fires. These burn huge expanses of dried peat and stubble which, when burned, release precious nutrients that the rains will take advantage of by reintroducing them into the soil, thereby revitalising it.

Time echoes dustily. The walk seems to be endless. All of a sudden a muttering is heard which, in a crescendo, soon becomes a continuous clamour. The gods have

decided to make the heavenly dome shed tears of life: it is the start of the rainy season and, with it, hope and the renewal of life.

The first drops run along the impermeable earth, flowing into the beds of dry rivers and shrivelled up pools; soon the torrent overflows the banks, irrigating the surrounding fields. Grass will soon spring up promising days of abundance.

The elephants wait nervously, trunk at the ready, until at a subtle gesture from the matriarch they advance to the water's surface and, thirstily, bring their trunk to their mouths, quenching their thirst. In the distance, a herd of the same species is approaching and converging towards the alluvial fan. It is the start of the season of abundance and rejoicing, of celebration and social communion, of strengthening ties and exchanging affections because Eden is ephemeral.

The path becomes increasingly intricate until it leads to a wide expanse of grassland. Fresh balls of dung indicate that other pachyderms are not far away. The season of plenty brought by the rains does not last long.

The direction of the breeze indicates that the moment to continue their journey has arrived. They make their way back to their track, retracing their steps. Always moving and vigilant, the elephants begin their journey in the opposite direction to ensure their subsistence and continuation of the species in a permanent search for food.

There are two species of **African elephant** which belong to the genus *Loxodonta* within the family *Elephantidae*: the **Savannah Elephant** (*Loxodonta africana*) and the **Forest Elephant** (*Loxodonta cyclotis*). There is also the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), which is smaller and

has its own distinct characteristics. Let us consider the African species because these are the ones linked to San art.

These giants are animals with a well-defined social structure. Males leave the clan when they reach adolescence (aged 10 to 12), opting to live in small groups of their own sex or alone and only come together to mate. This expulsion from the initial herd happens to prevent them from mating with females biologically close to them. Until they leave their birth groups, they follow the herd of females and calves who are all related to each other (mother, sisters, cousins, aunts, nieces and grandmothers) in herds led by the wisdom of the matriarch who will guide them in their constant movement. Their superior senses of smell and hearing guide them to water and food in a form of subsistence put to the test on a daily basis.

The matriarch is a historian, the guardian of knowledge. She has a mental map that covers all the land they traverse and has memorised the trails and water sources that years of

## LIFE, *MUSTH* AND DEATH

A slight maternal nudge encourages the calf to enter the puddle. It screeches for a moment and then falls silent. It rolls and rubs itself on the squidgy earth delighting in the play, completely enthralled with the choreographed game it has invented.

They all love wallowing in the mud, rolling around or using their trunks to spray the dark liquid over their large bodies. The layers of mud form a tough coating that protects them from insect bites and, at the same time, helps to

experience have taught her. The whole herd trusts her, following her without questioning her leadership, knowing that she will guide them successfully to the best of her ability. The mothers unite to help each other but obedience to the matriarch is non-negotiable. The extended family and the safety of the herd provide unparalleled protection.

A female often removes herself from the group to have her offspring. Hours later she re-appears bringing a waddling newborn barely able to stand on its own four feet. The herd huddles together to create a wall of safety around it to protect it from possible predators.

Offspring learn through observation and imitation. The mother patiently shows and teaches it how to do things. Juniors watch and learn: they will be breastfed for at least four years so they have time to perfect their feeding techniques. Around the age of eight, they become independent — the males abandon the group; the females stay together helping to bring up and protect the young.

form a protective heat barrier, blocking ultraviolet rays and keeping their body temperature under control. What is more, the wrinkles of their thick skin allows the wet mud to cling tightly, making their hydration last for dozens of hours: without these wrinkles, the mud would quickly dry out and start to chip off.

However, pools of mud can become a death trap twice over: if they miscalculate the depth of the pool, elephants may not be able to get out and will sink into the

mud; or if it is almost dry, it may trap them inside, killing the old and tired or the inexperienced unaccompanied calves.

When coming to their seasonal feeding places at different times of the year, these mammals face two distinct realities: in the dry season, they have to dig holes in the ground in search of underground water that other smaller animals then take advantage of; in the rainy season, the waters which flood the wells and the hollows allows them to take mud baths that increase the size of the pools. These are then able to store more water which other visitors can benefit from. As such, creatures of all sizes owe a great debt to these pachyderms as they increase access to this precious commodity. When the water runs short, the powerful and strangely gentle beasts turn the mud baths into dust baths.

He lifts his trunk to smell the breeze. He then places it on the ground and sniffs, searching for traces of urine from any female. His hormones are a powder keg making him potentially aggressive.

Elephants live in small matriarchal groups of females related to each other along with their young. When young males reach adulthood they break off and form their own groups or forge their own path. When in a group, they fight for a place within its hierarchy and when they establish this, it is for life.

Glands on the side of the head secrete a hormone-rich substance which announces that the male is ready to mate. This is the rut. Testosterone levels increase making them unpredictable and aggressive and this leads to fights between them in an attempt to assert dominance and gain privileged access to females.

They only enter this period every ten

to twelve years and become territorial at this time, which explains their erratic behaviour and a certain tension in the air.

When they walk along in parallel it is serious: this means they are sizing up their opponents and deciding whether to take them on. Wiggling their ears can mean two things: they are cooling their bodies or it is a warning sign that they feel threatened. *Musth* makes them aggressive. Their rage is rarely deadly but when it happens, it is intentional.

The delicate giant stopped. He had reached the end of his journey. His old body fell to the earth and he waited.

Elsewhere, a calf starts to fall behind. The mother slows down the pace of her walk, encouraging her to continue with gentle taps of her trunk. Her little daughter is limping more and more. At a certain point she stops and lets herself fall. She will not stand up again.

Nearby, somewhere in the distance, the distressed cries of a lost calf make it sound almost human. Its cries are heard from far away, but no member of its species helps. A feline waits among the undergrowth. When it sees the time is right, it rises up and fulfils its carnivorous destiny.

Silence reigns and devours everything. The hyenas do not take long to come and feed on the carcasses. The vultures circle round. On the ground, a marabou detects a smell it is all too familiar with.

A cruel setback awaits the approaching herd. The body — any of the three above — has been mummified by the drought and semi-devoured by predators. All that is left is the cracked white skull. In an unusual death ritual, the group silently approach the bones and, with a sepulchral calm, deliberately touch them with their

trunks in an especially gentle caress.

In fact, what the elephants are doing is expressing an emotion — grief about the death of one of their kind. Their intelligence and empathy allow them to do this since they are animals with an extraordinary sensibility.

But they do not linger. They know that you either move forward or you die because there is nothing for them in the parched earth and the dry grass flooding the barren landscape.

All that remains in the silent scene is this touch of compassion for the dead, quickly erased by the wind sweeping across the open countryside.

Some believe that when an elephant becomes too old to keep up with the herd, it moves away from the group to die in a secret elephant graveyard. The legend comes from the 19th century when travellers discovered ivory which had accumulated in dry pools and concluded that elephants chose a specific place to die. The most plausible explanation is that when they feel weak or without strength

## KEEN SENSES

These giants of the savannah, the desert and the forest all have heightened senses. Peer communication and the way they use smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch provide considerable insights into the evolution of the species. For their objectives to be fully achieved, they use a sensory system that, used in unison, boosts the success of their proposed mission and makes them special animals that are closer to humans.

Both physically and emotionally,

because of old age, they let themselves be left behind because they can no longer keep up with the pace of the herd and know they cannot slow it down without endangering everyone's survival. This is something that is not exclusive to them but is shared with the San. The Children of the Wind know that only the fittest can survive, and on the long journeys they undertake in extreme conditions — let us not forget that most of them live in the Kalahari desert — only the fittest can continue in their search for food and water. So when a member can no longer accompany the group (children, the old, the weak, the sick) they are left behind and the San move on.

Bushmen are connoisseurs of roots, tubers and shrubs and use them for food as well as to make drugs and poisons with which to kill their prey. To store water they use ostrich eggs which they bury in the desert, identifying the spot with a stick so that when they return, they can find the eggs and use the water. When the earth is empty of roots and eggs, death lurks and grabs whoever it wants.

elephants are true giants.

Like all mammals, water is essential: they can smell it (olfaction), hear it with their feet through the vibrations in the earth (hearing), taste it (palate), feel it (touch) and, of course, see it (sight).

They rarely sleep and when they do, only for a couple of hours a day, they stand upright; only the young and the most vulnerable lie down, nestled between the female's feet with the herd attentive and forming a protective barrier around them.

For a short time, they may rest under a tree in a star formation, their defensive position. Later the matriarch hurries to give them the starting signal knowing that everyone depends on her memory and determination to reach the next safe port of call.

## SIGHT

Elephants are born practically blind. Their sight develops with age but never becomes acute so they compensate for this by having better hearing (trunk and feet) and smell (trunk).

## HEARING

The ground, silent. At a certain moment, one of the herd emits a deafening warning lifting its trunk off the ground. There is something in the air, a loud noise somewhere in the distance. One of them stops and raises its foot. Motionless in the air, it seems to be preparing to take a dance step. Then it raises its trunk and stops. The pose, frozen in the instant, resembles that of a dancer in a *grand finale*. Nothing happens. Or so it seems.

Elephants have exceptional hearing and can «hear» with their feet and trunk. This means that sound waves coming from miles away are picked up by the sensitive cells at the extremities of their feet (*Pacinian corpuscles*) and/or their trunk as they vibrate across the ground spreading out in all directions.

How do they do this? By lifting a foot and immobilising the sole in the air or by placing the tip of the trunk on the earth, they feel the vibrations on the ground or transmitted through the air

in their nerve endings. This warning, inaudible to the human ear due to its low frequency, is then sent to the brain, decoded, assessed and interpreted. It can send different messages: danger (roars of a nearby feline), alarm signals from nearby elephants, or a sign of water (from a river current, or thunder announcing rain) among various other indicators.

In the same way that they can «hear» with their feet, elephants can make themselves heard by beating their feet on the ground, thus sending messages on the same frequency to other elephants. This means they use subtle but far-reaching infrasonic communication.

It is indeed the case that elephants have a much wider audible spectrum than humans, which is why they pick up frequencies that are inaudible to human beings. In addition, they emit a low frequency rumbling capable of travelling over kilometres, normally when they are distressed or lost. Reinforcements usually arrive: sometimes on time, sometimes too late. This is the law of nature. At other times, when distressed, they emit powerful sounds to scare off predators (felines). This usually happens when young are around. The young animals place themselves between their mother's feet to defend themselves against any bolder attack. The giant ears also serve to combat heat: when temperatures become too hot, elephants pump extra blood into their ears (via the blood vessels in them) and shake them, which lowers their body temperature. This helps to cool them down and provide relief from the heat.

## SMELL

The trunk rises in the air and hangs there. The elephant is searching for the smell of water and finds it. She continues walking and, hours later, her sense of smell shows her that she was not wrong.

The elephant's sense of smell is one of the most acute in the animal kingdom and allows them to gather important indicators for their survival on their never-ending journey. They do this by lifting their trunk, that is, they use what is called «periscopic sniffing» when they want to learn more about their surroundings. It is with this heightened sense that they follow ancient migratory routes, sniffing the air in search of water and food.

The trunk is part nose and part upper lip through which they can smell water which can be kilometres away and this is the secret of how they find hidden water sources. Whether it is a riverbed, a dried-up pool or a pocket of groundwater, their sense of smell leads them to find the water resources they need even when they are scarce or invisible to the naked eye.

Elephant trunks, which can weigh up to 140 kilos, are known for their varied abilities and are used to move and manipulate air and water as well as food, tree trunks, branches and other objects.

An adult elephant weighs between four and six tonnes and is on average four metres tall. They can eat (about) 200 to 300 kilos of vegetation daily and drink the equivalent in water so, as a result, each day they spend about 16 to 18 hours feeding. They use their trunks to pluck branches from trees and drink water by sucking it «both on land and under water».<sup>1</sup>

However, some elephants lose their trunk during their life, especially when

they are young, either because they have been attacked by crocodiles or hyenas, or because of traps set by human beings. This is why many of them will have to learn to survive without help. This makes them much more vulnerable and often puts their lives at risk since the trunk provides precious help in feeding, defending themselves and socialising.

## TOUCH

Elephants do not just communicate through their rumblings. When socializing, they often wrap their trunks around each other's heads as a kind of petting — in other words, their trunks are also used for caressing, fighting or simply juggling for fun.

In addition, as mentioned above, they can «hear» with their feet and/or their trunk by touching the ground or immobilizing it in the air. Their sense of touch is therefore broader and more developed than in most mammals.

## TASTE

At the head of the clan, the matriarch moves forward cautiously but at the same time with a certain urgency. She has led her family to safety and now it is time to join the other families at the waterhole who, driven by their thirst, are engaging in a feast of audible splashing. A little calf, not quite fully adjusted, tries to drink the fresh water but in vain; he has not yet mastered how to do this with his trunk. The trick is to get the hang of using it, but that presupposes a long learning curve that will come with time.

Their extraordinary adaptability makes these greedy mammals survivors in almost any geographical area as they feed on branches, bushes, grass, leaves,

bark, tubers, bulbs and minerals. In fact, in times of drought and deprivation, when food is scarce, they even eat soil, the composition of which contains minerals and salt, essential for their survival.

Adults pick up grass from the ground or tree branches with their trunk, using the tip to seize the food with a dexterity that reminds us of the hand of a primate. They also use it to drink water: they fill it with the precious liquid and then squirt it into their mouth, a technique that requires some learning. The trunk — which may have around forty thousand individual muscles — is a versatile appendage and contains two finger-like protuberances<sup>2</sup> which makes it sensitive enough to pick up a single blade of grass, but at the same time strong enough to pluck the branches off a tree, or investigate roots or bulbs. On an adult body, the trunk is two metres long and is the perfect tool for grabbing, pulling, smelling and feeling: it is an arm, a hand and a nose, but using it requires a lot of practice and youngsters find it difficult to control. Often, while mothers concentrate on eating, the youngsters socialise and play in a carefree manner because they can rely on their mother's milk. This is a crucial way to develop social skills that will help them throughout their lives.

At first glance, its ravenous appetite may appear to be destroying resources that will not be renewed but this is almost never the case. Its feeding method — between grass and branches — is part of a dynamic process that offers plants and animals various opportunities, which makes it an agent for diversity within the ecosystem. Without elephants, the ecosystem would be in danger because then the balance would be altered. For example, felling trees to reach the greenest foliage changes

the landscape and if it were not for them, the savannah would be a forest. However, they leave the undergrowth for smaller herbivores to conceal their young, to feed or just for felines to hide in so they can surprise possible prey.

Of course, when confined to small areas, these mega-herbivores can alter the structure of the flora and fauna as they can reduce the biomass of plants and vegetation, which can lead to a decline in other smaller animals. There is therefore an impact on biodiversity to be taken into account when there is overpopulation or when the passage corridors of these large mammals are reduced.

The fact is, though, their instinct makes them feed almost always without exhausting their essential resources. They know how to manage their sources of subsistence and they also know that if they abuse them, they will not survive. Given this, when they feed they take care to leave small shoots and give nature a chance to recover. If their appetite matches their size, their digestive system does not. Their weak monogastric digestive system means that they digest only part of what they eat, in fact, roughly less than half. That is why their dung contains countless seeds that replant the forest as they walk and leave their excrement behind, thereby helping reforestation. It should not be forgotten that these seeds are naturally surrounded by a fertilising bag (the faeces themselves) that allows them to germinate more quickly; in other words, with their superficial digestion and the vast distances they travel, they are active agents in the renewal of the ecosystem they are part of and so regenerate its cycle. Above all, their droppings are pure fibre, so they serve as food for other smaller herbivores, such as



baboons, squirrels, hornbills, beetles or butterflies. For example, the dung beetle carves a ball out of elephant dung which it rolls into its underground larder and on which it will feed for some time. In fact, everyone benefits: take the case of baboons who, when feeding on tree tops, drop food (fruit) that the giant herbivores take

## AFRICAN FOOTPRINTS

As we have already seen, elephants are of great importance within the ecosystem as they help to keep forests and savannahs alive either by dispersing seeds that their droppings contain or by thinning weak trees that help create space for healthy ones to grow. They are therefore active agents in transforming the landscape, regenerating deforested areas or areas with low tree density, thus effectively contributing to biodiversity and the balance in African habitats. But there are more inhospitable places, very scarce, where this mutual cooperation is difficult to achieve.

The following list does not set out to be exhaustive but rather a starting point for a personal itinerary of limited time.

### ADDO

Addo Elephant National Park is one of the oldest parks in South Africa and owes its existence to the efforts of Sydney Skaife (1889-1976) who tried to provide a sanctuary for the species. The elephant processions seen here show they are completely at ease without any apparent anxiety caused by the human presence.

With a feeling I cannot express in words, I had time to observe them here moving

around unhurriedly, at will, along random trails. The low undergrowth of Addo made it easier to spot them, but what made all the difference was not coming across any vehicles. There was no shouting or pushing forward to block the view; rather, a silence in the presence and majesty of such creatures, and a full enjoyment that is atypical in today's noisy and hurried world.

### THE KALAHARI

A timeless place and one of the most unforgiving and desolate on Earth, where the mirages, refracted heat waves, seem like a sea of water. A pure illusion, blurring the horizon and making life difficult. The Kalahari desert stretches over almost a million square kilometres and spreads over three countries: South Africa, Namibia and Botswana.<sup>3</sup> The Central Kalahari Reserve, the second largest in the world, possesses a harsh, semi-arid climate, a Martian landscape that has made it one of the most intact wild spaces on the planet and where the challenge of life seems destined to fail. Totally wrong!

For more than 40 thousand years, the only human inhabitants of the Kalahari were the San. They called it Kgalagadi, *Land*

*of Thirst*. A place where the sun proves at its most powerful and is the absolute master of what is, at first sight, a barren realm that in recent decades has witnessed increasingly severe heat waves. Its growing area has turned it into an indomitable heavyweight, where that celestial body has become a despot straining existence to the limit. In this vast wasteland, uninterrupted as far as the eye can see, defined by grasslands, barren heaths, sandy areas, swamps and dry valleys with dwarf shrubs and thorny plants, where under normal circumstances nothing is believed to happen or subsist, life has adapted itself and does in fact happen. That is why those who inhabit it are unusual beings, heroic survivors.

As far as elephants are concerned, they have adapted to the climate and geography in order to withstand it. Developing unique characteristics that allow them to adapt to the extreme conditions of Damaraland, they have less body mass than their counterparts, which translates into less need for food while also making them lighter to cross the dunes and rocky terrain. They can go several days without drinking and can even travel more than 200 kilometres in search of water. They have therefore developed the ability to «smell» underground water from kilometres away. As an extra aid, they also have larger trunks, which makes it easier for them to dig deeper into the ground, and they use their tusks and feet for additional help. This exceptional adaptation makes them the last surviving large mammals of the desert, but the holes they dig to obtain the precious liquid also benefit other smaller animals that could not otherwise survive, such as the oryx, the small antelope, jackals and various birds. An additional attribute is they take considerable care

not to destroy the few trees and bushes on which they feed to enable their regeneration and avoid devastating the resources they know are scarce.

## OKAVANGO DELTA

Maun, the main town of the Okavango situated at the south-eastern end of the delta, is the gateway to a first contact with this unusual ecosystem. On board a small plane it is possible to obtain an initial glimpse of the alluvial fan which, instead of flowing into the sea, seeps into the desert in what is the largest inland river basin in the world. Once on a north-westerly course, we flew over lands of different colours: black (from burning) and whitened (from aridity), interspersed with various shades of green. All this made up a miraculous fusion of geometries and colours. Pools of water and herds of different animals could be seen with impressive clarity, along with the rapid changes of textures within a liquid landscape. The wide hydrographic network makes the currents and swamps stand out transformed by the light. The delta's biodiversity, seen from the air, translates into a whole alphabet of signs which resembles a gigantic flower spread over northern Botswana, with the stem sloping south-westwards towards the Namibian border and the petals of silver water stretching for hundreds of kilometres into the Kalahari basin.

In terms of its origin, this delta is formed by several rivers that have their source in Angola intermingling and joining together in a single watercourse to cross the border where it is then called the Okavango. The Okavango Delta is a hydrographic network of rivers and lakes and is a territory that is constantly

changing, a living organism where its seasonal channels form a lacy watery web of lifelines. As the waters erupt from the north, the watery maze widens and floods the land to form a sheet that reflects the sky.

Elephants contribute to this phenomenon on various levels and are considered the architects and gardeners of the region. Why? Architects because, as they pass by to feast on a buffet of aquatic plants (papyri, rushes, white reeds), they prevent the canals silting up, helping to link them and to drain lagoons in a regenerating web. Without the elephants, these courses would stagnate and asphyxiate, which makes them key elements in the renewal of vegetation and the oxygenation of the delta, the source of life for the Okavango. Gardeners because, on the islands of the Okavango, they shake the palm trees and make the dates fall, which they then hurry to eat. However, these date palms can only germinate when ripened at the right temperature, the same temperature that an elephant's gut maintains. As a result, they leave their dung behind on the trails they follow with this excrement then replanting the earth. This is the reason we say they are the great architects and gardeners of the Okavango as they leave traces that renew and remodel its changing landscape.

Surrounding the delta lies the Kalahari. To the south is the Boteti River, marking the end of this seasonal hydrographic complex and the beginning of the desert. Its water table stretches 300 kilometres and is the only source of permanent water during the seasonal cycle establishing its geographical rhythm: droughts and floods, hardship and abundance, life and death in the perpetual wheel of creation and destruction.

## ELEPHANT SANDS

Elephant Sands lies in the middle of a corridor along which elephants pass and where they are stopped in their tracks by a waterhole. This is why Elephant Sands is a special place, even if the platform in front of the watering spot is often a stage for noise, exclamations, camera flashes and other actions not quite in keeping with such an observation post.

The first animals arrive at nightfall. Silently, they emerge from the blackness of the night. What is most astonishing about this is that they move so delicately that, despite the tons they weigh, you cannot hear them approaching. And the reason for this? They have very wide feet: their toes and bones are quite high and rest on a cushioned elastic pad. As such, their considerable weight is well distributed and this cushioning enables them to walk unnoticed, often barely leaving a trace.

The four presences offer a haunting serenity. After quenching their thirst in the boundary pool, they leave as silently as they arrived, blending into the blackness of the night.

The void left would be filled shortly afterwards by another approaching herd. However, they do not stay long because of the increase in the watching crowd and arbitrary gratuitous noise that makes the pachyderms move away to waterholes with a smaller concentration of rather 'unwise' *Homo Sapiens*.

## SOUTH LUANGWA

As soon as we arrived at the Wildlife Camp, providence graced us with an amazing sunset, one of those to be found on a magazine cover: on the riverbank, in the

foreground, a group of impala were lapping up the water; in the mid-distance, a line of elephants were slowly crossing the Luangwa while the great star was setting in the west and outlining their silhouettes. The peaceful postcard setting was then completed as the giants approached the other bank of the river. Without any specific focal point — other than a sky painted in a mix of pinks slowly fading to purple as the river continued to glide north — the elephant procession stopped to drink and the matriarch turned back to confirm that the young ones were all there. They soon marched on, leaving the empty space to become flooded with darkness despite there being a lingering violet trail on the horizon.

## GORONGOSA

The aggressive behaviour of the elephants in Gorongosa in Mozambique is well known. The reason? Decades of conflict: first, the war for independence; then, the civil war that meant that over 90% of these herbivores were killed. Their meat was used to feed soldiers and the ivory was sold in exchange for arms. As a result, the surviving elephants were traumatized — some still have bullet wounds in their ears — and began to take their anger out on humans, their long-time predators. They attacked in groups, alternated in leading the pursuit, blocked off the track for vehicles, surrounded them and attacked. Afterwards, they retreated and celebrated their victory, interlocking their trunks. This is amazing since they are the only animals in the animal kingdom to use such a precise strategy, a coordinated attack leading to a victorious retreat in a perfect military manoeuvre, showing not only sophisticated communication skills but also strength

of character and a form of highly evolved behaviour. All of this is documented and recorded. How can we reverse the process?

Scientists say that it is by regaining their trust through a discreet presence that does not invade their living space, sending an unequivocal message that we do not wish to harm them, but only observe and learn. But healing the wounds and trauma of war takes time since the scars are deeply entrenched and present in their remarkable memory. Many of these elephants, now adults, saw their mothers being indiscriminately slaughtered, which gave them to understand that all humans are evil. Furthermore, this massacre deprived them of the teachings of the matriarch making them today leaders without the skills learnt through their upbringing and education, a crucial lack of knowledge that translates into deficient and partial behavioural evaluations. These war memories continue alive in their prodigious memory making it difficult for them to trust humans.

Another amazing characteristic of these mammals is that most of them show a genetic predisposition to be born without tusks. If, among the African elephant population, the percentage where this occurs is around 2% to 3%, in Gorongosa it reaches 60%. Why is the rate so high? The answer lies in the war which not only shaped the behaviour of the elephants but also reconfigured their bodies: in other words, they ended up not only with psychological scars but also genetic ones. By being born without tusks, they have a greater chance of survival since they are not a target for poachers. Isn't this extraordinary?

To understand the origin of this evolution, scientists<sup>4</sup> began to sequence the genomes of elephants with and without

tusks. The analyses showed there was a mutation in the X chromosome which was fatal for males and dominant in females. As in most mammals, male elephants have XY sex chromosomes and females have XX. If a gene in one of the X chromosomes carries a dangerous mutation, the female does not have to worry because she has the other X chromosome. Female elephants pass on the chromosome with a mutation to their young, which, in humans, reduces the growth of the upper lateral incisors, the equivalent to elephants' tusks. This discovery could have several long-term effects for the species. This mutation can be fatal for males as tusks are used in the mating struggle for supremacy and it is possible that fewer elephants are being born overall, thereby delaying the recovery of the population of the species. On the other hand, this evolutionary response to poaching, motivated by the sale of ivory to fund the war effort, makes the species much more likely to survive since, without tusks, there is no reason for them to be killed. But it is not just that: according to research from 2021,<sup>5</sup> the tusks are tools which are essential for the survival of both sexes as they are used to defend themselves, to fell trees, to feed themselves and to find water and minerals. They are precious tools and their absence can lead to an imbalance and even a decline in the population. This is because, without tusks, their diet is different and they have different practices, which affects the ecosystem as a whole since they play a key role in habitat equilibrium.

The healing process at Gorongosa has been operationalised but it will take time. It is not only in Gorongosa that human activity has had an impact on animal evolution. Over the past few years there

has been a reintroduction of animals — mainly from the Kruger Park in South Africa — in order to recover lost fauna and flora. Elephants form a pivotal link in the food chain of the park as they not only keep the vegetation under control but also renew and reinvigorate it to balance the ecosystem for other species. The same is true of the Addo Elephant National Park (South Africa) and the Ruaha National Park (Tanzania). Elephants have a perception of what we are and of our intentions. If we are attentive, we can understand by the signals they give off whether they are, or are not, receptive to our presence. They instinctively know whether we are cruel or innocent, strong or weak, arrogant or genuine. Ultimately, understanding wildlife can be summed up in one single word: respect.

# EXHIBITION



*Africa changes you forever, like nowhere on earth.  
Once you have been there, you will never be the same.  
But how do you begin to describe its magic to somewhere who never felt it?  
How can you explain the fascination of this vast, dusty continent,  
Whose oldest roads are elephant paths?*  
Brian Jackman

## ICONOGRAPHY

Through a short review of their visual representation in western culture, the Asian elephant can be found in a variety of records, much on account of it being domesticated early on and used for riding and as a beast of burden unlike its African counterpart which has always been wild.<sup>1</sup>

Images of elephants were not entirely unknown to the Old Continent before the Modern Age: in the East, the use of elephants in war went back to ancient times and echoes had reached the West through their representation, notably of the Battle of Gaugamela (331 BCE)<sup>2</sup> when Alexander the Great defeated Darius III of Persia. Alexander's army included some fifteen elephants.

However, the Carthaginians were the first to use African elephants for the purpose of war. They were forest elephants<sup>3</sup> with characteristics that made it easier for them to cross mountains as was the case when Hannibal crossed the Alps (the 2nd Punic War) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. His most commonly used tactic when employing elephants was to carry out massed charges on the enemy, a generally deadly action that would become one of the signatures of his civilisation.

According to Pliny the Elder, only the elephant that Hannibal rode, which was called *Surus* or *Sirus* (probably an Asian subspecies *Elephas maximum indicus*), was able to carry a structure, or *howdah*, on its back. From high up, the soldiers managed to protect themselves and attack at the same time. The *mahout* was in charge of taming and riding these animals. They were guided by an iron

rod with a hook at the end and they were often given palm wine to incite them to do battle. If any elephant became a risk for the soldiers in his camp, the *mahout* used a hammer to plunge a spike into the elephant's spine or skull.<sup>4</sup>

With the death of Alexander the Great, his empire disintegrated and Seleucus I, one of his officers, sold the conquered territories in India for the price of five hundred war elephants, which he used in his ongoing fight against his Macedonian rivals.

African and Asian animals were one of the first exotic elements used by the crown of the Portuguese Empire and they played an important role not only in the metropolis — Lisbon — but also in the European courts of humanist Europe at the time.

There had, of course, already been a visual genealogy of animals from outside Europe since Antiquity, of note being a Roman coin from 193-211 minted with the image of an elephant.

However, it was during the period of the Portuguese (and Iberian) Expansion that the configuration of the world changed significantly, becoming global. As a result of this expansion, the territories that had once been imagined and mythologized in terrifying legends became known and, along with this, representations of their inhabitants and cultures began to circulate more quickly and more frequently.

It was in the capital of the empire, Lisbon, that actual experience with exotic animals from Africa, particularly the elephant, occurred and it was from here that it travelled to the European courts. There are references to the presence of

this type of animal in Lisbon as from the mid-15th century, largely due to the narratives of royal chroniclers who recount how elephants became one of the main symbols of power at the Portuguese court, thereby differentiating it from other European courts.<sup>5</sup>

The reason for this was that the Portuguese empire was the first to exploit — and to bring back on the return journey — specimens of these African giants.

It is difficult to imagine how, in the overcrowded caravels of the time, an African elephant or rhinoceros could have been put on board. It is even more difficult to understand how they could have been kept alive during the voyage and even more complicated to understand how they could have been taken off the ship and survive in a climate and environment completely different from their normal habitat.

The earliest source referring to elephants in Portugal is probably the diary of the ambassador Nicolau Lanckman de Valchenstein, which was only published in 1503 but written around 1451, in which the author describes an elephant being exhibited in a parade in Lisbon. Then, in 1477, King Afonso V (1432-1481) offered an elephant as a gift to René de Anjou (1409-1480). From being merely a diplomatic present, it became a symbol of the power, majesty, prestige and distinction of its owners, in this case the Portuguese court.

In Lisbon, it is known that King Manuel I (1469-1521) promenaded with elephants from the Ribeira Palace to the Cathedral, as shown in an image in the 16th century *Leitura Nova, Livro VIII* by Odiana, in which the sovereign can be seen riding on the back of an elephant. What is also known is that the monarch had a tapestry in the Royal Palace in which were embroidered

elephants inside a city next to a reflecting pool. This interest in elephants at the Manueline court led the Portuguese king to demand that the king of Ceylon deliver ten Asian elephants to him every year. It is therefore not surprising that his daughter-in-law, Dona Catarina of Austria (1507-1578), ordered the four royal tombs in the pantheon in the Jerónimos Monastery to be set on sculpted pairs of elephants.

Connotations inherent to a representation of this type are based on associations with the mythical power, longevity and memory of these unique animals. It must not be forgotten that in Europe at that time there was a huge void of knowledge about these creatures; hence, they were considered exotic in the true meaning of the word: external to common experience.

In addition, the narratives of authors and chroniclers at the time of the Portuguese Expansion (such as Castanheda, Barros, Góis and Pero Vaz Caminha) told of encounters with this animal as well as their journeys around Europe to enable them to become known.

Within the context of political power and diplomatic relations, the elephant was used as a symbol of indisputable dominance and unquestioned imperial supremacy. For example, take the Embassy of King Manuel I to Pope Leo X in 1514: as propaganda and a display of the Portuguese monarch's authority, he sent a commission to Rome that was representative of his power and ready to parade before the head of the Catholic Church. What was the goal? To obtain the Pope's blessing to recognise him as Lord of the West and Emperor of the East and capable of civilising the world through missionary work. And who was at the head of this procession? Who was

the exotic and distinctive icon leading this display of pomp and ceremony and unequivocal power? It was Hanno, an emblematic elephant from India. Nicolau de Faria, the king's master of horse, was in charge of Hanno; he was the elephant's keeper. The sight of an elephant in Rome provided a metaphor for the dominance of Portugal, a giant capable of embracing and leading a vast territory, a world that had just been made known to Europe by the Portuguese. Not since the conquest by the Carthaginians in the 3rd century BCE had an elephant entered the Italian city.

Returning to the Lisbon of King Manuel I's time, as mentioned above elephants were part of the daily life of the city in the eyes of a population that was at first amazed but then became used to their unusual presence. In the stables of the Ribeira Palace, the royal residence, there were elephants which paraded at the head of processions in a cosmopolitan metropolis that was one of the most bustling and eclectic in the West at that time. In the monarch's *Book of Hours* there is a mention of the king riding an elephant and the court historian, Damião de Gois, reports in one of his chronicles that Manuel I owned five elephants. There was also a rhinoceros and, according to royal accounts, there was even a fight arranged between these animals for the pleasure of Lisbon residents.

However, even earlier, depictions of elephants had appeared in European art. In *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, dated 1504, Hieronymus Bosch offers us one of the best period drawings of an elephant. At the time, Bosch was living in Antwerp, more precisely in the street of the Portuguese Factory, so he would certainly have been informed of the presence of elephants at the Portuguese court.

There is also an elephant in the tapestry *Triumphal Procession with Giraffes*, attributed to the Tournai workshop and dating from around 1510, although the design is clearly not a perfect, realistic representation. This tapestry now belongs to the Ricardo Espírito Santo e Silva Foundation.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, more specifically in 1615, the work by Manuel Godinho de Herédia entitled *História de Serviços com Martírio de Luís Monteiro Coutinho*<sup>6</sup> contains a series of watercolour drawings showing the martyrdom of Coutinho's companions at the hands of the Acehnese,<sup>7</sup> who are shown riding on the backs of elephants.

In 1637, Rembrandt (1606-1669) had the opportunity to meet Hansken, an elephant from Ceylon which had just arrived in Holland to the great amazement of the country's inhabitants. One year later, in 1638, the artist painted *Adam and Eve in Paradise* and, in the bottom right-hand corner, there is a small round elephant, certainly inspired by Hansken. In 1641, he used her image again, drawing her in a series of sketches that show her in various poses and from various angles. Entitled *When Rembrandt Met an Elephant*,<sup>8</sup> these drawings were on display in an exhibition held at the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam in 2021.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the sculptor Machado de Castro (1731-1822) placed an elephant knocking over a slave at the base of the equestrian statue of Dom José I (1714-1777) symbolising the extent of the dominions of the Portuguese empire. In the 20th century, the paintings *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate* (1944) and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1946) by the Spanish Surrealist painter Salvador Dali (1904-1989) take up the theme again, but in the light of Surrealism, showing

elephants balanced on legs that are as spindly as the antennae of crustaceans.

But perhaps the most naïf but no less inspiring elephant representation of the 20th century is *Elephant* by Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), with its graceful outline, a minimal line that contains within itself the intrinsic beauty of a whole species.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an exhibition that toured all over Europe in 2018, *Animal Inside Out*, displayed real animals (that had not been killed or ill-treated) showing their insides and the similarities between organisms. Samba, an elephant from a German zoo, was the first animal to be submitted to this pioneering technique of plastination<sup>9</sup> in 2005.

In 2021, the exhibition *Terrible Beauty*, promoted by the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, called attention to the Elephant — Human — Ivory triangle by showing creations by contemporary artists on the theme.

Also in 2021, one of the rocks in the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary in Kenya — the first African sanctuary owned and managed by the indigenous population — was the target for an intervention by the artists Ami Vitale (1971-) and Youri Cansell Aka (1987-), also known as Mantra. Based on a photograph by Ami Vitale,<sup>10</sup> Mantra painted the head of an elephant from the Namunyak conservancy on the stony escarpment in a giant-sized ephemeral conception (using water-based paint). The idea underlying this non-perpetuity has a specific purpose: «The painting will not last forever, but the memory of what was created in the community in which it lies will live forever». In the words of Ami Vitale, this action «intends to conserve nature through art» and «were rock paintings not the oldest form of storytelling». The location

was not chosen at random: in the past, it had sheltered elephant hunters but today it is where the elders of Samburu gather, thus retaining a powerful symbolism. But this artistic creation is much more than just that. Ami and Mantra intend to draw attention to the urgency of conservation by «conspiring to make the wildlife dream a reality».<sup>11</sup> Let us hope it fulfills its role of fading in ephemeral time while watching herds of elephants pass by on their continuous journey.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century Portugal, there are some important works where the representation of elephants is the subject or the theme. One example comes from the Colonial Exhibition held in Porto in 1934 where an elephant sculpture dominates the façade of the Palace of the Colonies and the actual official brochure of the event has a drawing of the animal. Previously, in 1931, the magazine *Portugal Colonial*<sup>12</sup> had a drawing of two African elephants, a fact that was repeated in a tourist leaflet from the Information and Tourism Centre of Angola. And note the parade on the occasion of the Great Exhibition of the Portuguese World in Lisbon in 1940 in which there is a live elephant that reminds us of Dom Manuel I's processions in the same city in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Also in the 1940 Exhibition, the Portuguese India Section included a sculpture of an Asian elephant. More recently, in 1996, the artist Júlio Resende (1917-2011) painted *Pink Elephant* at the time of a visit he made to Goa, the former Portuguese colony in India.<sup>13</sup>

What should also be mentioned but in the realm of literature is the 2008 work by José Saramago, holder of the Nobel Prize for Literature, *The Elephant's Journey*. This is the story of the journey made by the elephant Solomon from Lisbon to

Vienna on the occasion of the marriage of Maximilian of Austria in 1551. This unexpected wedding gift, a very highly visible present showing the splendour and exoticism of the Portuguese court (and of its king Dom João III — Maximilian's cousin — and his wife Dona Catarina), involved an Indian elephant and her mahout being escorted by knights on horseback over mountains, down valleys and along roads on a journey of some 2900 kilometres, the distance that separated the Portuguese

## FOOTPRINTS IN PORTUGAL

Around 35,000 years ago elephants could be found in Portugal, more specifically at the mouth of the River Enxarrique (Estação da Foz do Enxarrique) and in the southwest corner of the Alentejo (Costa Vicentina).

Located in the Naturtejo da Meseta Meridional Geopark, the Foz do Enxarrique site is one of its most important paleontological sites in international terms and has yielded a huge number of archaeological and paleontological finds including traces of the presence of the European Elephant in continental Europe before it finally became extinct during the last Ice Age.

«U-Th radiometric dating of osteological material associated to the lamella of an upper molar of *Elephas antiquus* and other bone remains showed that the last elephants in continental Europe lived in the Tagus valley 33,000-34,000 years ago. These dates became a benchmark for the international studies that were subsequently undertaken, seeking to determine the causes, either natural or anthropogenic, of the extinction of

capital from Valladolid (where Maximilian, the Spanish regent was) and Vienna. There Solomon's days came to an end after the winter of 1553. Saramago's work is largely an exercise in imagination even though it contains some factual references.

This artistic list is not exhaustive but merely aims to show the proliferation of representations that from Antiquity to the contemporary age have found direct inspiration in elephants.

this and other large mammals.»<sup>14</sup>

Also along the Costa Vicentina (in the areas of Porto Covo, Vila Nova de Milfontes and the dunes of Malhão), three *Elephas antiquus* trails have been identified as well as some isolated footprints belonging to these elephants, which had long, almost straight tusks and lived in Portugal at that time.

The three elephant trails were the first to be discovered in continental Europe and may represent one of the last pieces of evidence for the presence of *Elephas antiquus* in Portugal when they passed through here around 35,000 years ago before their extinction in Europe. The fossilised footprints are useful for understanding the ecology and behaviour of these large mammals, which became extinct with the dramatic climate changes that occurred during the last Ice Age.

The genus *Elephas* originated in Africa, a continent from which there were two geographic dispersals: one to Asia 3 to 4 million years ago, which gave rise to the Asian Elephant; the second to the Near



East and Europe less than 3 million years ago which led to the European Straight-Tusked Elephant species, or *Elephas antiquus*. They arrived in the Iberian Peninsula some 900,000 to 1 million years ago and, adapting to the temperate and wetter climates of the interglacial periods, thrived in the forests of Europe.

In Portugal, the oldest finds are in

## THE CIRCUS AND THE ZOO

The trend nowadays is not to put animals on show and exhibit them, whether in circuses, zoos or elsewhere. A general awareness has taken hold that animal juggling is the result of training that implies the use of force, which causes suffering and stress, not to mention the abuse they are subjected to when the curtain falls, i.e. cramped cages, whips, muzzles and electric batons. Examples such as the *Cirque du Soleil* show that human art is enough to maintain the greatest show on Earth in good health without having to include acts with animals carrying out skills that are not natural to them.

In Portugal, the programme to hand over wild animals being used in the circus was funded by the state through the Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests and was based on the Law for the Protection of Circus Animals, passed in October 2018 and enacted in February 2019. This law states that no wild animal can be used in circus shows and so the animals that were still shown on the posters of circus companies were delivered into the custody of the State. The State bears the responsibility and is obliged to transfer them to institutions capable of receiving them or

Condeixa (Middle Pleistocene, 329,000 years old) in addition to those already mentioned from the Middle and Lower Tagus and the Costa Vicentina. The Straight-Tusked Elephant reached a height of up to 4 metres (males) and weighed over 6-7 tonnes. Their tusks were up to 2 metres long and they lived in small herds of up to 15 individuals.

to wildlife sanctuaries. In 2022, the last wild animals handed in by circuses were sent by the Portuguese authorities back to nature; none of them were elephants.<sup>15</sup>

However, the issue of animal relocation is not straightforward, especially in the case of large creatures such as elephants.

As for zoos, the general trend shows that the number of animals acquired is decreasing, but there is no international recommendation in this regard to prohibit this, so each country decides as it sees fit. There is a great discrepancy in methodologies, acquisitions, exchanges between peers and returns.

In 2021, France inaugurated the first elephant sanctuary in Europe to shelter animals that had been living in circuses and zoos. Elephant Haven — European Elephant Sanctuary (EHEES) is in the region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine in the Parc Naturel Régional Périgord Nord and occupies an area of 28 hectares. The objective is to take care of elephants and encourage their reconnection to the natural environment. Hence, volunteers and visitors have no direct contact with the animals so as to guarantee their peace and positive adaptation to the environment.<sup>16</sup>

Still on the subject of zoos, but this time human ones, it is important to mention that western history in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century is full of exhibitions of «Human Zoos», particularly involving people from imperial Africa and Asia. Exhibited as «rare and exotic animals» because of certain specific anatomical features, men and women were displayed in international, universal, world and colonial exhibitions, in fairs and freak shows, circuses and reconstitutions of indigenous villages. This chapter of our history shows how society used major public events to shape the representation of the «Other» by segregating them. In the search for exoticism and the picturesque bordering on the macabre and morbid, the Old Continent drowned its own fears in these exhibitions. The exhibitions often emphasised the cultural differences between «civilised» Europeans and «primitive» natives, such as Saartjie Baartman (1789?-1815). At the very beginning of the 19th century, Saartjie — a member of the San people — was taken from South Africa to Europe and exhibited as a bizarre attraction between London and Paris. Her physical features were ridiculed by a corset-clad society, becoming an unfortunate symbol of the exploitation of Africans by the West and of racism in a Europe that sought to legitimise its empires

## ILLEGAL TRADE

The international trade in elephant ivory is forbidden under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES). This document, signed by 183 members

through the «civilising» action of the Other. Saartjie's physical features were caricatured in order to highlight her difference from white women in a social construction that amplified and reinforced racist theories. Given the name the *Hottentot Venus*, for an extra payment the exhibitors allowed visitors to touch Saartjie. This caused such a scandal that the African Association (London), a philanthropic society, brought a court case and the London show was banned. Sold to a French animal tamer who saw in her an opportunity to make some easy money, Saartjie was exhibited in Paris, naked, then she was led into prostitution and became an alcoholic. As Olivette Otele notes in her *African Europeans, an Untold History*, «Baartman became known at a time when the losses of Napoleon were viewed as the failures of a whole country. Her alleged deformity served as a ploy to entertain while restoring control to a bruised French masculinity and providing a sense of superiority to white French women at a time when fascination for black women's supposedly sexual attributes verged on obsession».<sup>17</sup>

Coming from afar, the echoes and wails of Saartjie would only be silenced two hundred years later when her remains were finally returned to her homeland. This episode marks just one of the shocking abuses carried out on the San people.

including the European Union, encourages states to ensure that ivory of illegal origin is destroyed. In China — the largest consumer market of elephant tusks — a national law in effect since 2018 was created with the

aim of putting an end to the trade. But we all know how interests do not wane from one day to the next and the more persistent buyers continue to deal in ivory; to do so, it is enough to travel outside the country.<sup>18</sup>

By publicly destroying the ivory that is seized, the authorities want to discourage illegal trafficking; however, this has not put an end to the slaughter of elephants for their tusks. Whether it is because corrupt governments turn a blind eye or because there are powerful oligarchs or poor communities whose poverty pushes them to commit illegal acts, the black market in ivory remains and in some areas has even increased. Crises, pandemics, corruption or unemployment mean that many people risk their lives, letting simple greed overtake the consequences of being caught or as a result of their desperation to feed their families. As is common knowledge, from 2020 to 2022 a new coronavirus affected all sectors of the global economy, particularly the travel industry, to an unbelievable extent. As a result of this, the work carried out by patrols in some wildlife parks in Africa was affected by the lack of income which led to budget cuts in surveillance and this caused illegal hunting to increase.

Meanwhile, another problem has derived from this and is mentioned above in relation to Gorongosa: as a result of continual hunting in the last few decades, many elephants are being born without tusks.

However, these ivory tools are essential for the survival of the species since they are used for multiple tasks: to knock down trees, to dig waterholes, to scratch the ground looking for essential minerals and in the fight for the females they want to mate with among other uses that are still to be discovered.

In the final redoubt where elephants with large tusks are to be found — Tsavo national park in Kenya — there are no more than thirty of the so-called ‘tuskers’ left. The reason their tusks reach to the ground is the result of genetics since larger and thicker tusks are an inherited attribute that is passed down from generation to generation. As you can imagine though, ‘tuskers’ are the most coveted poaching targets in the world, the biggest trophy you can aspire to. This makes them more vulnerable to being blindly pursued and to certain death. Luckily, a Herculean effort is being made to protect them but not always with the desired result. Institutions, NGOs, governments and philanthropists have united in the struggle for the survival of this mega-fauna although they would seem to be more threatened than ever.

In the field of San art, the outlook is no brighter: a huge number of San paintings are disappearing as a result not only of the wear and tear caused by natural agents (such as wind and rain), but mainly because of perverse causes: smoke from campfires, vandalism and the theft of entire friezes sent to museums in both the West and the East.

Many museums and institutions (principally South African) house rock art panels that have been removed but little has been written about the historical context of such transfers.<sup>19</sup>

Other sets of paintings have been disfigured and scratched in acts of gratuitous vandalism. Many of these pictorial ensembles are located in remote and hard-to-reach areas away from the tourist circuits and off the beaten track, preventing them from being included in the first line of funding for protection,

conservation and dissemination. It would seem that some national heritage authorities in Southern Africa (and not only, since the same destruction of ancient paintings has been found

## TRACES OF ART

*Africa's rock art is the common heritage of all Africans, but it is more than that. It is the common heritage of humanity.*  
Nelson Mandela

The first known accounts of African rock art outside the African continent seem to have been made by the Bishop of Mozambique who, in 1721, referred to sightings of rock paintings at the Lisbon Royal Academy of History [Real Academia de História de Lisboa]. After that, reports, copies and publications about rock art from all over modern-day South Africa were produced with growing frequency by military officers and explorers. As it became increasingly well documented, rock art generated growing interest leading to the publication of numerous studies. Further intensification of research and the recording of archaeological and anthropological data in the 1950s to 1970s resulted in new interpretations and approaches to Southern African rock art that have come down to the present day. This can be seen by the latest studies by J. Francis Thackeray (2019) and John Parkington and Prada-Samper (2021).

Sadly, the San's inspiration to leave their pictorial testimony on the rocks came to an end a few centuries ago. The reason? The arrival and colonisation of the

in Australia and Libya among other countries) have failed to protect the sites they oversee.<sup>20</sup> Let us just hope the situation changes before it is too late.

white man and the near annihilation of a people who did not know confrontation.

Surviving according to the times and will of the people, the art engraved on the stones by the San evokes a beautiful, fragile and deeply sensitive reality. This chapter lists some of the places where this unique creation can be appreciated, but it focuses on drawings, paintings and engravings centred on the representation of elephants.

It is important to understand why the San have repeatedly painted elephants. The underlying reason, it seems, lies in the fact that elephants did not belong to those animals hunted by these people, who set them apart. According to San legends, elephants preceded humans who resembled them in behaviour, personality, empathy and intelligence; hence the San saw them as mythological beings, founders of a superior race that preceded man. The San's great respect for any kind of life made them great admirers of elephants so that in their imaginary they came to share a common root, becoming one. This can be seen in one of the figures depicted in the Drakensberg caves,<sup>21</sup> where a man-elephant or an elephant-man can be seen in what is clearly anthropo-zoomorphism<sup>22</sup> and therianthropy.<sup>23</sup> What is certain is that there is a deep identification between the San and elephants and the recognition of this has endured through time and space.

The idea that there are half-animal, half-human hybrid creatures exists in all cultures. The San painted them four thousand years ago: a man with an elephant trunk.

On the other hand, the similarities of giving birth and the creation of the species led the San to believe that humans and elephants shared a common genealogy — several months of gestation, breastfeeding, the raising of their young, empathy with the dead, socialisation and memory. This symbolic and spiritual relationship (and connection) had a great influence on many of the San's initiation rituals and ceremonies, especially in the field of dance and song; hence the existence of representations of therianthropes where the elephantine form is fused with the silhouette of the San, as in the case of the Ebusingate engraving in Drakensberg. In a universe that is not devotional but a formal representation of everyday reality, the creature is given a half-human, half-elephantine appearance, endowing it with a hybrid power; this results from the similarity of a set of characteristics (being mammals, having a longer gestation period, living in groups, among others).

The connection to water is another factor whose importance is not insignificant. The sensitivity of these giants allows them to smell and excavate underground water as well as hear a thunderstorm hundreds of kilometres away. For the San, water is a vital and rare resource, and the pressing need to find it has led them to develop unique skills and perception, just like elephants. They often store water in ostrich eggs which they bury in the desert, marking their position with a stick. During the dry season, these reserves of the precious liquid are

their lifeline, just like the underground waterholes are for the elephants.

Nomadism is another characteristic common to both: elephants and the San are constantly travelling in a nomadism inherent to their survival. Given the limited resources of the land, they both search on their journeys for the subsistence that will ensure the continuation of the species, travelling along routes that have been engraved in their memories over the centuries.

Symbolically, symbiotically and spiritually, the San have bonded with the elephants with whom they have shared time and space, and the giants have played a leading role in the cultural and ritual life of the «people that follow the elephant».<sup>24</sup>

Far from being an exhaustive list, the places mentioned below are a sample, mere indicators of the prolific San art spread across part of the African continent.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Cederberg. Although I had been forewarned by the images reproduced in numerous books, nothing prepared me for the unexpected beauty of the Cederberg. Witnesses to a lost world, these paintings are a moving expression of the first concerns of the human spirit. Here «there are over 200 shelters in the Cederberg which have reference to paintings of elephants.»<sup>25</sup> Among them, the cave at Stadsaal synthesises two worlds in one, showing human silhouettes in ceremonial dress next to several elephants. Around a thousand years old, these representations show the cry of the human torn from their animal condition, rising through art in a pristine co-existence of mutual respect.

The way the elephants were

painted shows a real understanding and knowledge on the part of those who painted them, the San: they have correct proportions and are presented realistically in their natural environment, in herds following in a line and with their young in the middle so they are protected from possible predators. These paintings are a tribute to the matriarchal structure and way of life of elephants constantly on the move; an analogy and metaphor for the San's own way of life.

## NAMIBIA

In Namibia, places such as Twyfelfontein, Spitzkoppe, Brandberg, Erongo and Tsisab conceal over a thousand rock shelters, with a total of more than 45,000 paintings, which makes this country a unique place for San culture. Many of the paintings portray the region's wildlife, including the giant desert elephant, and reveal an unusual sensibility.

## BOTSWANA

In Botswana there is a sacred place for the San — Tsodilo. Also the area of Manyana, more specifically in the Kolobeng hills, is a sacred place for the Children of the Wind.

## ZIMBABWE

In what was once called Southern Rhodesia, Chikupo, Manemba and Charewa are key places for San art while Murewa, Guruve, Marondera and Mutoko have unusual representations of elephants.

A detailed list has been drawn up by various African organisations in an attempt to understand and put into perspective a collection that is constantly being reformulated as paintings are lost and others are discovered. In any case, there is a whole field of solid research and work from which to get a precise idea of this unique legacy although it is always a surprise and a delight to discover new recorded examples.



## TOURISM

Tourism adds complexity to the equation of balancing the African ecosystem in terms of both nature and cultural conservation. This happens because the promotional discourse relating to the destination (or the tourism product) often minimises the impact, not highlighting the pressure exerted by the visitor on the habitat and on the indigenous culture.

It is well known that there are some activities in the travel industry that are not recommended when it comes to maintaining wildlife conditions and sustainable tourism. Riding elephants is one of them<sup>1</sup> since interacting with wild animals means capturing them and breaking up their families, training and punishing them, abusing them and physically assaulting them in an almost inexhaustible catalogue of violence. This direct contact with wild animals is an experience that has been greatly encouraged on social media with countless selfies being taken with elephants, leading others to copy them. Whether they are starring in acrobatic shows or giving rides, what happens is that the animals are isolated from their social groups, poorly fed and subjected to intense training that involves violent punishments with the aim of taming them so they become docile and, consequently, revenue earners. However, behind the scenes of these places with interactive experiences, mistreatment dominates daily life because in order to make them obey, the keeper uses tools such as the goad or bullhook — a long stick with a sharp metal hook at the end — to prick them, thus forcing them to undergo domestication training that

is counter to their nature. The illusion that the animals are having fun, are well cared for and live happy lives is shattered as soon as the tourist turns his back: out of camera range, the reality is sordid and far removed from the tourist poster painted at the entrance. Chained and shackled with rings with metal spikes that dig into their ankles, or with manacles that bind the two front legs together, their exploitation for entertainment involves coercion and punishment.

In many of these recreational «sanctuaries», it is explained to the visitor that by paying for the experience they are helping not only the animals in captivity to survive but also their future reintegration into the forest. It turns out that many of these animals, once in captivity, lose their ability to survive in their natural habitat, which makes it impossible to return them to the wild. There are successful cases, of course, but not all «sanctuaries» are run by people with good intentions. You therefore have to look beyond the tourist poster and get reliable information. Ultimately, if the visitor becomes more aware, attentive, informed and resilient, both sides will win: the tourist enjoys a genuine experience and acquires an altruistic commitment while contributing to the livelihood of local communities, promoting the fight against poverty and maintaining an effective income for the inhabitants of the tourist areas involved; and the locals will reap dividends of their own as they are able to maintain or improve their quality of life by preserving the natural and animal environment and passing it on to future generations.

Another important issue in tourism is safety. Game drives offer a truly extraordinary experience to observe these animals in their natural environment, but we must not forget that it is we humans who are invading their living space, so we must respect their behavioural patterns and try not to interfere with the wildlife. Hiring accredited professionals and behaving calmly whilst keeping a suitable distance away allows you to watch herds safely and create a comfort zone in which the animals do not feel threatened. This ensures that tourists can enjoy themselves to the full. Basically, it is about respecting the natural surroundings and keeping the focus on the greatest reward: observing animal life.

When for whatever reason — do not forget these are wild animals — they feel threatened, they are the first to show signs of impatience. You must just be vigilant and this is where the role of the conscientious professional makes all the difference as they know how to read the signs and react according to the seriousness of the situation. Here are some examples of signs of discomfort or unease in elephants:

- They open their ears wide along with shaking their heads and making certain sounds.
- They pull their ears back and curl their trunk up (on one side of their head).
- They suddenly come closer or start a focused chase.

In this case, it really is time to back off, drive backwards, quickly gain distance from them and later try to reflect on the cause of this behaviour in order to avoid repeating it in the future.

As for rock art tourism, it has a particular value as it represents a differentiating, unique cultural product while at the same time spreading tourists out across remote rural areas, thus promoting decentralisation. This dispersion is important because then the income from the activity goes directly to the local communities without being absorbed by international tour operator networks.

For conservation reasons, and to provide visitors with a rich and rewarding experience, all visits to rock art sites should be accompanied by a local guide who can enrich the cultural experience by contextualising and drawing attention to the history involved. On the other hand, poor management of the site can lead to its destruction, which is why governments must prioritise effective legislation to safeguard and conserve heritage, empowering agents to protect it. This requires a significant investment of time and money but, above all, it requires a commitment to maintaining a unique legacy for future generations giving it an importance that is not always valued.

The various routes and itineraries that exist designed by different agents (ranging from universities to municipal councils and local communities) have proved to be a driver for the safari industry since they combine animal observation with a complementary ancestral pictorial culture providing artistic enjoyment and thus adding value.

In addition, since the Covid-19 outbreak, travellers have become more interested in meaningful human connections. As a result, linking the environment with culture is one of the most promising ways to travel, a unique opportunity to use nature as a living and thought-provoking classroom.

## ANIMAL CONSERVATION

The whole issue of conservation led me to try to better understand all its implications and so I read compulsively, trying to grasp the different sides of the issue.

I was struck by the sensitivity and inspiration found in Lawrence Anthony's books. In *The Elephant Whisperer*, he shows how it is possible to conserve without domesticating in language that speaks to us of loyalty and commitment, of the spirituality of wildlife. Animals have their own intrinsic spiritual value, just as the Bushmen believe and every enlightened scientist knows. Anthony inspires the reader like a prophet — the prophet that Khalil Gibran describes in his book of the same name — recounting the alchemical, so to say, relationship he has established with these mammals. But even Anthony could not stop himself from visiting *Nana*<sup>2</sup> every time he felt the need to reflect and decide, finding by observing his muse the essence he had temporarily lost, as almost all of us find ourselves lost in this pressing and increasingly upside-down world. With a keen sense of perception, Anthony argues that the greatest reward we can have is to leave elephants to live wild in their own habitat, observing them from a distance in the stillness of the savannah and in the solitude of our own thoughts, enjoying contemplating them but without interacting...

In *The Last Rhinos*, Lawrence Anthony analyses the increasing aggressiveness of wild animals towards humans, including elephants. There are a growing number of examples — not only in Africa but also in Asia and North America — and it seems there is a kind of global telepathy among

predators which has led them to take revenge for all the torments inflicted on them in recent centuries; for example, the increase in the human population and the consequent reduction in their natural habitats, together with the parcelling of land where fences prevent the free movement of animals along their migratory corridors. The most visible consequence of this is the increasing frequency with which they invade and destroy the crops of local communities in search of food. We must also take into account the compartmentalisation of the savannah into reserves with electrified fences which cut off their vital corridors. This fragmentation of the territory has segmented geographies, forcing them to confine themselves to areas where they quickly run out of food sources. For this reason, human-elephant clashes are increasing in number, with the latter invading villages and towns, devastating fields and threatening defenceless populations.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this situation leads to conflicts with rural communities and exacerbates a problem which requires not only legislation by the authorities to minimize it but, above all, the involvement of the local communities who are crucial to the success of the endeavour.

Some of the most pressing issues making conservation a more complex issue than one might at first assume are the following: the stress caused by safari tourism, the frequency with which resident populations do not enjoy any kind of direct economic benefit from tourism (i.e. from private reserves), their losing their livelihood with the destruction of their crops that feed the hungry

herds, and the increase in the number of elephants due to the hunting ban.

What is certain is that elephant attacks have increased and so has hostility. Often, to make matters worse, conservationists, locals, rangers, politicians, scientists and tour operators have taken a one-sided view of the issue, each defending their own interests and forgetting that only through co-operation and synergies can a minimally acceptable result be achieved. Compounding the problem, many African countries mould their wildlife policy according to the criteria of Western donors who, sitting in the comfort of their own lives, are far from understanding the African continent and its idiosyncrasies. There are, however, a few happy exceptions to not giving in to external pressures, but they are still a minority.

As James Clarke wrote in his *Save me from the Lion's Mouth. Exposing human-wildlife conflict in Africa*, the political authorities forget to include local communities in plans to safeguard wildlife. As a result, poachers armed with AK-47s illegally invade parks and reserves at the behest of unscrupulous countries that buy rhino horn and elephant tusks from them believing that by ingesting these substances they will become supermen.

Peter Beard's precocious and prophetic book, *The End of the Game: the Last Word from Paradise*, documents with hauntingly beautiful images the future prospects for the «Great Game of Hunting» in Africa. 'Hunting' not only in the nominal sense of the word, but also figuratively since the pressure has been felt not only through hunting but also through the scarcity of sufficient resources to ensure animal survival. The author warns of a phenomenon that few people talk about:

the death of hundreds of elephants due to lack of food because of fewer food corridors. «They weren't lucky enough to die from an arrow or a bullet,» writes Beard referring to what happened in Tsavo in 1971 in a text accompanied by heart-breaking photographs. As mentioned above, with the increasing subdivision of land into private game reserves, fences have become barriers to the ancestral trails cyclically travelled by the herds; what is more, the increase in the rural population and the consequent increase in grazing along with the scarcity of food condemn a horrific number of elephants to death every year. This is nature's response to the limited amount of resources, and it is not just pachyderms which are affected since the problem is transversal to all species. Underlying this, romanticised ecological ideas, out of touch with local reality, have created problems and suffering instead of preventing them.

In terms of global pollution, the scenario is no less alarming. Take the case of elephants dying from ingesting plastic<sup>4</sup> as a result of the loss and degradation of their natural environment, making the species increasingly vulnerable and jeopardising their survival. Climate change (and global warming) has been destroying the world's habitats and ecosystems complicating the survival of flora and fauna, especially mega-herbivores which do not have enough resources owing to the huge quantities they need to ingest. The scarcity of water has also exacerbated the situation by drying up waterholes and not flooding the savannah, which prevents vegetation from regenerating and developing. However, protecting large animals can help combat climate change as they play an important role in the recovery of ecosystems. How? According to researchers at Oxford

University, «animals such as rhinos, elephants and giraffes contribute to this in three ways: by helping carbon storage, by reflecting solar radiation and by preventing fires. On the first point, they disperse seeds during grazing, clear vegetation and fertilise the soil, which helps to build more complex and resilient ecosystems. This leads to an increase in the storage of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the soil and vegetation and a decrease in this gas in the atmosphere. Secondly, by trampling vegetation they are changing habitats from shrubs and trees to open areas, which results in areas which tend to reflect more solar radiation into the atmosphere, which in turn makes the Earth's surface cooler. Similarly, during grazing in areas with woody plants they are also reducing the risk of forest fires»<sup>5</sup> in addition to being considered — as mentioned above — the «gardeners» of the savannah (by planting trees through the seeds contained in their dung). These trees are «high in carbon density and get rid of the weeds that are the low carbon density trees so they do a tremendous job maintaining the diversity of the forest»,<sup>6</sup> which helps renew biodiversity, increasing its heterogeneity and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere. This restores and diversifies ecosystems making them more resilient, which mitigates some of the effects of climate change.<sup>7</sup> Hence these gentle giants play a crucial role in safeguarding the planet, «thinning the tropical rainforest canopy by eating taller, fast-growing trees that capture less carbon. This creates more space and sunlight for the slower-growing trees underneath which capture more carbon from the environment.»<sup>8</sup>

«If forest elephants are lost, we are doing a global disservice to climate change

mitigation,» says biologist Stephen Blake from Saint Louis University in Missouri. Using data from previous studies and new information gathered in the field, Blake's team analysed around 200,000 records of forest elephant feeding patterns in Africa, covering more than 800 individual plant species. «Elephants' preference for lower carbon density trees seems to be due to the nutritional value they get from them rather than availability: they are more palatable to the animals and easier to digest.»<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, global warming has made both water and food scarce for these savannah giants; this is reflected in their behaviour (leading to elephant-human conflict, invading and destroying farmland, and attacking and even killing people) and in the fluctuation in their numbers that leads to an imbalance and death.

It is therefore important to understand how to preserve this species, and what is the key and/or compromise that can guarantee their survival which is so greatly threatened. We would say common sense and co-operation — in a word, resilience — but we know how simplicity is one of the hardest things to achieve. Whichever way we look at it, conservation will always be a complex issue in which myriad imperatives determine policies and orientate perspectives that are rarely adjusted to the interests of wildlife and the surrounding communities. It is important to maintain hope and, if possible, help with the solution, even indirectly. Fortunately, success stories have been multiplying (see the case of the Reteti Sanctuary or the Sarara Camp<sup>10</sup> in Kenya) although not always at the same rate at which humans are destroying and annihilating these African giants.

Directly or indirectly, within each

space, critical situations are becoming worse (note what has happened recently in Southern Africa). In Botswana, the death of over 330 elephants in the Okavango Delta region in the summer of 2020<sup>11</sup> was caused by a neurotoxin produced by microorganisms called cyanobacteria. Also known as blue algae, they use light from the ground to sustain themselves and live in water as well as on land. Perhaps the worst, though, is the drought plaguing the strip from Namibia to Botswana and encompassing Zimbabwe and Zambia, the region where the continent's largest elephant population is concentrated. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which has provided data to monitor the Paris Agreement, temperatures in Southern Africa have risen twice as much as the global average. This has prompted African officials to take action in an attempt to solve the problem although the measures are not without their critics. In order to mitigate the conflict between elephants and humans, and to avoid slaughtering animals, the Namibian government has put 170 elephants up for sale<sup>12</sup> claiming the purpose is to prevent the slaughter as the proceeds from the sale will be used for their conservation. In addition, the same source claims that the population is increasing, which bodes well for the future of the species.

However, consensus is far from being reached: animal rights activists fear that animals will be sold for hunting expeditions, or to the exotic meat or leather industries. It is known that the sale of game and hunting concessions have been recurrent measures taken in Southern Africa to deal with drought. Like Namibia, the government of Botswana — the country with the largest number of

elephants (over 130,000),<sup>13</sup> a third of the continent's total — has decided to take measures that include returning a few thousand elephants to Angola, according to Bloomberg.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the 1975-2002 civil war in this country, a large number of these animals fled to Namibia, and the aim now is to return them to their place of origin, thus relieving the pressure they put on Botswanan and Namibian resources.

As for Zimbabwe, the same cyanobacteria found in the water that wiped out over 300 elephants in Botswana has killed more than thirty in what was formerly Rhodesia. In the country with the second largest number of elephants — around 85,000 — the situation is getting worse every day. According to Tinashe Farawo, the spokesman for the Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, more deaths are expected.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the bacterial infection, some of the animals may be dying due to the stress of walking long distances in search of food and water, said Farawo, adding that overpopulation has become «the biggest threat» to the survival of wildlife in this Southern African country's parks. «The animals are becoming a threat to themselves,» he concluded. The previous year (2019), around 200 elephants in Zimbabwe died of starvation due to the country's drought.

Everywhere their habitat has shrunk. This is an undeniable fact. Ivory poaching is far from slowing down and clashes with local populations continue to escalate. Hunting has been gaining ground on almost all fronts through bribes to governments, communities and companies, who have no qualms about collecting clandestine commissions despite the successive laws passed to protect the species. It is estimated

that in the 19th century there were 20 million elephants in Africa. Today they number less than half a million. According to recent figures,<sup>16</sup> the population of elephants in the wild is around 415,000 and their situation is extremely vulnerable: in some places their numbers are increasing, but in most they are decreasing.

Another aspect of animal conservation has to do with reserves, parks and sanctuaries. Wildlife sanctuaries try to rehabilitate creatures with the ultimate aim of returning them to the wild but there are some animals and species that will never be able to survive outside the sanctuary. This happens for various reasons. One of the main reasons relates to orphans: because of the death of their parents, or because they have been weakened by illness and/or disability that prevents them from surviving without protection, the youngsters have been placed in sanctuaries interrupting their education for survival and autonomy in the wild. In these protected spaces, even though there are programmes for gradual reintegration into the wild and contact with humans is limited, many will never be able to leave the fenced-in area of the sanctuary. But, as with almost everything, it is the approach of the mentors in charge of each place that determines the outcome — serious or dubious, reintegration or exclusion. The commitment of organisations such as the Nairobi Sheldrick Wildlife Trust or the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary (both in Kenya) has validated the project of reintegrating elephants into the wild; however, we know how fragile the continuity of these programmes can be. The case of Namibia<sup>17</sup> also shows that the right solutions are not always the most obvious ones and that there is a need to adapt and even take risks on decisions

that might at first seem misplaced.

Another relevant aspect that has already been mentioned, but not explored in depth, is the removal of fences between private reserves whose land borders each other. This has made it possible for larger animals to roam across a wider territory and therefore have a greater diversity of resources. But these associative partnerships are far from being the norm — most build their fences without taking the movement of species into account. So, the solution to the problem will involve (re-)educating the owners of the reserves, making them understand that without concerted action between all the owners of the neighbouring lands, the fauna will decrease and, with it, the tourism that sustains them.

Another factor is that the management of funds for conservation programmes is not always transparent, which makes donors and philanthropists suspicious, or what is worse, it causes funding to be wasted on parallel activities that are not always clear.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, in 2020-22, the Covid-19 pandemic threatened decades of conservation efforts. Drastic cuts in tourism revenue — visits to reserves, safaris, etc. — led to reducing the number of African wildlife and cultural rangers, overburdening those who remained in active service. This has increased poaching and put pressure on Africa's wildlife reserves, which threatens to undermine the success of decades of conservation, according to a survey by Tusk and NATURAL STATE of 60 organisations in 19 African countries. This organisation explains that the crisis caused by the new coronavirus has eliminated the essential funding for wildlife protection that comes

from tourism. In 2018, the global wildlife tourism economy generated more than 100 billion dollars and provided nine million jobs worldwide. The impact of the pandemic on tourism revenue generation «has been so severe that almost half of the protected areas across Africa reported that they would only be able to maintain basic operations for a period of three months if the restrictions imposed by the fight against Covid-19 continued to be applied,» says Tusk, citing a study from July 2020.<sup>19</sup>

In 2022 and 2023, the drought caused by climate change caused more deaths than poaching itself.<sup>20</sup> According to the Kenyan authorities, the hydrological drought has killed twenty times more elephants than hunting.<sup>21</sup> In African countries, the number of images of animals that have died as a result of water scarcity has increased exponentially.<sup>22</sup> This shows how the giants of the animal kingdom now face a greater risk than from other old threats — climate change. But it is not just the lack of water — the stress caused by the search for scarce food and contamination of water and vegetation weakens the elephants' bodies making them more susceptible to disease and death.

Another measure that can be taken is moving herds between parks in order to balance the habitats and preserve the savannah ecosystem. This is why there are «exchanges» or «removal» of animals from game parks where the population is in excess (jeopardising resources) to others where their numbers are lower than what is recommended.<sup>23</sup>

It is also a known fact that the climate will aggravate conflicts between humans and wild animals,<sup>24</sup> with the latter seeking food in areas inhabited by local communities. These clashes often

result in loss of life and material goods. In times of drought, mega-herbivores roam the outskirts of villages in search of water and food, destroying crops and being killed. These direct interactions between humans and wild animals have negative consequences for one or both parties — among the adverse effects of such confrontations are injury, death, property damage and loss of livelihood for rural communities. What is certain is that ecosystems with more species undertaking unique roles are the most resilient in the face of anthropogenic threats related to human activity. Whatever the solution, it must involve preserving wildlife while respecting everyone's own space and time in a constantly rebalanced co-existence.

The issue is therefore complex as it must take into account many variables as well as the context in which it occurs. Consequently, there is no one-size-fits-all solution; each case has its own specificities, which need to be taken into consideration.

Between war, poverty, corruption, vested interests, population growth, shrinking wilderness areas and climate extremes, the solutions are not straightforward. Some elephant populations have become hostile to humans in an ever smaller, more arid and extreme territory; others, although few, have seen their numbers rise.

August 12 is World Elephant Day, a date that aims to honour these giants and raise awareness of their protection and conservation while warning of the survival risks they face due to human activity. The initiative was created in 2012 by the Elephant Reintroduction Foundation and the founder of the World Elephant Society and, on this date, we are warned

of the real risk of their extinction as they are classified on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List as 'critically endangered' for the reasons that have repeatedly been announced: illegal hunting, ivory trafficking, habitat loss, ill-treatment and breeding in captivity, and elephant-human conflict. These have all contributed significantly to this outcome.

How can we help protect them?

We can help by not buying products derived from these animals, such as ivory objects or the tusks themselves; by choosing to get to know them in their natural habitats, in nature reserves or sanctuaries which respect them and work daily to protect them; by avoiding captive spaces where these animals are exploited for entertainment (zoos or shows); by financially helping only those organisations that contribute to research and the effective protection of elephants.

Or, as the World Elephant Society has announced, to mitigate threats we should develop policies and actions based on five structural pillars:

1. Climate Change: Climate change poses a more substantial threat than poaching; rising temperatures and intense droughts endanger elephants by affecting their water and food sources; water scarcity drives elephants into human habitats, generating conflicts; disrupted migration patterns complicate the elephants' search for sustenance and survival. A scenario with low greenhouse gas emissions, agriculture in harmony with the environment and the restoration of the ecological corridors they use to travel between territories will alleviate conflicts between the two

species and is crucial to promoting a less conflictual co-existence.

2. Loss of habitat: African elephants face a growing loss of habitat owing to factors such as agriculture, population growth and the expansion of infrastructure. This puts their ability to flourish in their natural environments at risk. Asian elephants have already lost 90% of their habitat due to agriculture and human invasion.
3. Human-elephant conflict: Both in Africa and India, the human-elephant clash arises from similar causes. Agriculture replaces the habitats of the elephants; the elephants travel further afield in search of food and water leading them more frequently into contact with humans; the farmers' preferred crops attract elephants intensifying conflicts; a growing population leads to fragmented habitats; roads and railways represent new dangers for elephants.
4. Poaching and ivory: Although current data on poaching is limited, the threat remains active; elephant poaching rates have fallen since 2011-2013, but they still fluctuate all over Africa; research shows that strong governance and greater human development reduce poaching rates; the pandemic led to a fall in the value of ivory.
5. Unethical tourism: Elephant rides and shows are largely the result of abuse and punishment in captivity.<sup>25</sup>

There are still a large number of elephants being used in tourism today. What is taken for granted is that mistreatment and cruelty are used to teach them to perform the tricks the audiences applaud. Turn your back on these experiences and support ethical observation in sanctuaries

that are truly committed to the welfare of these gentle giants and where they can be admired in all their wild glory.

In many places the San continue today to be ostracised and marginalised by a so-called inclusive and citizen society.

So, on a resilient, altruistic, effective and intercultural journey using tourism that is sustainable as well as regenerative:

## CULTURAL CONSERVATION

When it comes to cultural conservation, in this case the conservation of San art, the tentacular nature of the subject is more restricted but no less complex. Government directives regarding the safeguarding, conservation, recovery and valorisation of cultural assets of San origin have invariably been broken, either wilfully or out of self-interest or by a lack of vigilance and control of the areas where these thousand-year-old records are to be found. To say that there is a lack of political will is a platitude and does not contribute to finding an effective solution.

As we know, African cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, is not exempt from the dialectic between tradition and modernity that permeates contemporary African societies. The problems of its conservation, interpretation and dissemination as well as its adaptation and transformation within the framework of new cultural trends and social demands lead to a rethinking of its role in relation to the constraints of today's global culture. The cultural policies of African states and the international projection of their artistic manifestations are geared towards

Do not fund activities where human and animal welfare is not a priority. Choose consciously and have a responsible attitude. To do this, BE INFORMED, INVESTIGATE, QUESTION and then... decide and enjoy two empowering and impactful universes. To travel transforms and enriches our perception of the world!!!

leveraging cultural cooperation practices and policies. For this reason, as in other fields, local communities have been called upon to help conserve and promote these unique places since governments are unable to cover all the areas where this heritage can be found due to a lack of resources and other priorities.

The proposal of many of the countries involved is therefore to structure general heritage protection programmes, the specifics of which are later defined by partner entities such as local associations, universities and bodies linked to tourism and conservation. However, bringing all these entities together to design a coherent and equitable programme is not easy and requires resources that are often dispersed and channelled to other sectors. What is more, the key San art sites are located in places that are often remote and difficult to access, which complicates and delays the process of managing these sites. As a result, the threats to San art and the conservation efforts to deal with these threats vary greatly in the different corners of Africa, which is not surprising given the vastness of the continent.

As with other aspects of cultural

identity and preservation, there is much in-depth work to be done, which requires a real commitment to a unique heritage legacy. The challenge is enormous; however, in some African geographies, there are signs that we are on the right track, so it is important not to give up but to work hard to achieve this.

There are many people involved in the conservation and dissemination of San art. As far as the close relationship between elephants and San art is concerned, we should highlight the work of John Parkington,<sup>26</sup> Emeritus Professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cape Town (UCT); Pippa Skotnes,<sup>27</sup> a professor of Fine Art at the Archive Centre at the University of Cape Town and an artist, who has been portraying the elephant paintings in San art; Jose de Prada Samper,<sup>28</sup> an archaeologist at the University of Cape Town; and Andrew Paterson, a South African researcher who has been looking more deeply into the relationship between San paintings and elephants. This is just to name a few of the more prominent fans of this symbiotic, centuries-old relationship.

## THE SPIRIT OF SAN ART

The legend of Pliny the Elder (23-70 CE)<sup>29</sup> tells of a young woman who drew the shadow of the man she loved on the wall before he left on a long journey. The story expresses the subtle relationship between the need to represent something and the expression of emotion in a desire to perpetuate the form of a loved one. This is what the San did.

October 9 is European Rock Art Day, a date to mark the importance of an artistic legacy that was the founder of human creativity. The main aim of this commemoration is to emphasise the cultural, artistic and tourism relevance of humanity's first art that is preserved in many parts of the world but under constant threat in terms of safeguarding. As far as San art is concerned, the rocks and caves that house its pictorial representations are magical centres between the real and spiritual worlds, gateways to a higher dimension of humans' relationship with their surroundings and with life.

In a protocol that is transversal to responsible visits, tourists, guides, guardians or the simply curious are asked to take care to preserve this unique art by respecting the basic rules of those who claim to be civilised: do not touch, alter or disfigure the representations on display, do not light fires or steal parts of the set and, in addition, please respect and show consideration for the places where they are found.

The vast pictorial iconography spread across Southern Africa shows this and reveals the extraordinary sensibility of the Children of the Wind: drawing the outline, providing shape through line and then shading it with colour giving it a realistic appearance; a sensibility manifested through dots, which represent fragments of an impermanent world. A painted image

is pure appearance, the reproduction of a near reality. This mimetic status of painting gives it an almost magical significance in a conception of the image as a simulacrum.

Thus, in the genesis of Art History, San painting is the origin and the end: it is the oldest and it is also the closest to many of the avant-garde movements of the 20th century, in particular Cubism and Abstractionism, both of which are indebted to primitive African painting and sculpture. Contrary to what was claimed at the time, these artistic movements do not deconstruct the painting, but rather reduce it to its elemental form without any kind of secondary attributes; this brings them closer to the initiatory art of the San. And there is yet another analogy: by reducing the form, the painters of the European avant-garde imbued it with a subjective meaning (because not everything is there), which allows for various readings and brings them nearer to San art. It is not just a question of attending to form but of taking content into account.

By way of example, in the Nswatugi Cave in the Matobo National Park in Zimbabwe, at a certain moment, Ian — an expert and admirer of San art — placed the brim of his hat on what looked like an undefined shadow on the wall, which, as if by magic, was quickly transformed into two perfectly clear stylised figures: they are two spirits, which is why they were not painted to be seen with the naked eye but glimpsed from a shadow, like an apparition. The thought behind the painting is the transformation of identity into otherness, essence into presence which, under the viewer's gaze, is transformed into a self-reflexive discourse. This is because there is an intention underlying it that gives form, although it is not fully revealed at first

glance; hence it constitutes an ambiguous narrative, a double exposure with the attribution of a power, the power of concealment. There is thus a clear purpose, which is to illustrate the living world (of form) and the world of the spirit (content) through a projected shadow. As Stoichita points out: «This notion was intrinsic to the myth that [...] also involved the creation of a double. The relinquishing of this particular aspect by Western philosophy on the image can be attributed to a radical change of paradigm, which relegated the shadow-representation to the mythical time of origins.»<sup>30</sup> This particularity brings an unsettling strangeness, if only because of its elusiveness and concealment to the naked eye. It is the projection of our fears in a subjective and ambiguous visual field by investing the shadow with complex and mysterious narrative attributes, pictorial enigmas full of poetry not because of what they reveal but because of what is intuited from them. Thus, in a hermeneutic of San art, this is a veil suspended between two worlds: that of light and that of darkness, that of life and that of death, that of the visible and that of the hidden, in which the boundary is elusive and indeterminate.

Whatever it might be, and regardless of how you read it, there is no denying the current relevance of this simple-looking language, a form of artistic expression with multiple and uncertain meanings, but deeply fascinating! So let us appreciate it with the gratitude and reverence given to great works of art, because this is what we are dealing with!

## PERPETUAL TRAVELLERS

They once roamed freely across much of Africa; today, the majority of the San people, like the elephant herds, find themselves in a perilous situation caused by the progress of the global world: the former (the San) have been forced to swap nomadism for sedentary living, pushed into inhospitable regions; the latter (the elephants) find themselves confined to protected areas that are shrinking as the humanisation of the landscape (and the interests of governments) expands. Invariably, we all stand to lose if nothing concrete is done.

In a shared story of rise, decline and hope, the elephants and the San people have gravitated towards a land that sees them continuously on the move, their only constant. The intelligence, sensitivity and empathy with which they are endowed, the fact they are highly cognitive and hone their skills from the environment available to them makes both of them particularly special, unique beings capable of inspiring us to go further.

The challenge will perhaps be to create synergies capable of making the relationship between human society and conservation more resilient by promoting a greater commitment to cross-border cooperation which should be split between education and the promotion of sustainable behaviour. This is the only way to mitigate the disaster before it reaches the point of no return. It is therefore important to establish consistent and responsible criteria anchored in lines of action that must include the following:

- Sustainable and balanced social and economic development.

- Conservation and valorisation of heritage (natural and artistic) using up-to-date technology.<sup>31</sup>
- Integration of local communities in the management of tourist areas providing them with the necessary knowledge and resources.
- Articulated strategic planning between government departments, public-private partners and the resident population with close supervision by the appropriate authorities.

If there is a respectful, responsible and informed attitude, transformations do happen. The commitment will be to cause the least possible impact on the habitat and on the cultural and artistic legacy we visit or in which we live. This is why the reflection proposed is an invitation to raise awareness of the beautiful path we can build together. It is a gradual process and a way of enjoying a planet that has no owner but supports Life and Art for the enjoyment of all.

This initiatory journey has a specific vision: to leverage the integrated and subsequent perspective of a two-ringed spiral that intertwines elephants and San people through art and travel in a hybrid and fruitful combination, a rare jewel to perpetuate humankind in the face of their finite existence.

This is why having «a memory like an elephant» is an ode to the days we do not want to see end ... and that made up the journey that has now been completed. Along the way, a set of ideas has been constructed that includes regrets of experiences done through ignorance or

on impulse, but we all know that it is by making mistakes that we learn, grow and move forward. Yes, I applauded elephants in the circus when I was a child, smiled at them in the zoo as a teenager and, as an adult, rode on their backs in India, watched them paint with their trunks in the Thai forest, visited sanctuaries in Kenya and South Africa, (in)directly condoning less-than-recommendable practices. And I learnt! And what started out as a book of reflection became a work of discovery whose aim is to enhance the survival of two unique legacies, counteracting their decline through a geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural-artistic challenge. There are different types of response; the important thing is to fight the battles in order to have a chance of winning them. We protect and defend what we love because therein lies the substance of which we are made.

Ultimately, this testimony aims to inspire every one of us to take care of Nature and Art in a spirit of cultural and animal conservation, interconnecting creatures who are as enlightened and resilient as they are gentle, both of whom are a visual and sensitive ode to the majesty and fragility of the Earth, catalysts for the greatness of Life. Elephants: subtle and sensitive with gentle eyes framed by thick long eyelashes; the San: giants in slender bodies, wise with a disarming simplicity. Both ensure and add depth, perspective, dimension, beauty and possibility.

Summarising the thoughts behind this writing, I believe it is something extraordinary to preserve nature through art. This is what Ami Vitale and Mantra have done in northern Kenya by painting a giant elephant on a rock once used as a refuge by elephant hunters: the transformation of a place of death into a place of life

through art. This ephemeral record of a Namunyak elephant shows how committed are a group of people to conserving and publicising an endangered natural world.

- Once there were millions of San. Today they number less than one hundred thousand.
- In the last century, there were three to five million elephants.<sup>32</sup> Today there are estimated to be fewer than five hundred thousand living wild in Africa. In 50 years, 90% of forest elephants and 70% of savannah elephants have been lost with the future of the rest not looking good. The large-scale decrease in the populations of both African species is due to human activity on two important fronts: poaching (the endless demand for ivory known as «white gold») and the loss of natural habitats given over to agricultural use.<sup>33</sup>

The San paintings are visual poems engraved in stone, a testimony to the inexhaustible creativity of the spirit of a unique people. Their passion for drawing, their animal-centeredness and their broad aesthetic spectrum of mysterious meanings have attracted successive appropriations and interpretations.

This is why I chose to go ahead with this research. Although limited and incomplete, it aims to be a small contribution, a catalyst for conversations on the subject, presenting a centuries-old relationship of great relevance and beauty from which we can only learn and understand, enjoying and safeguarding it in an attempt to make our world more inclusive, resilient and altruistic in a coexistence of true alterity. The future survival of these magnificent mammals and San art and the San people

depends on us in the certainty that the emotions that radiate from them will enrich us and become part of who we are.

A loud trumpeting catches their attention. Leading the line, the matriarch starts to cross the track as she has heard and smelt the thunder in the distance. Movement is essential for the longevity of the clan and the renewal of life and so, light-footed, the mega-herbivores cross the path silently.

A few metres away, a San tribe watches them in religious muteness. These people have also read the breeze: it is time to leave so that survival is assured. After the gentle giants have passed, and without the slightest sound being heard, the Children of the Wind get up and set off. Their light bodies barely leave a footprint on the dry earth like the elephants that have just passed by. Both groups in constant movement, surviving without exhausting all the resources, both heading towards their own end crystallised in a final image in which the slow departure of both groups accentuates the pristine nature of the landscape in the face of the impermanence of life.



# FINAL MOVEMENT

At dusk, the atmosphere is tinged with an old gold colour, beckoning the night. Not far from the edge of the road, a slight figure crosses the dry land. Agile in his stride, he raises a fine layer of dust that rises into the air, blurring the contours. Everything else is silent.

A short while later, the walker's shadow disappears into the distance of the desert, leaving only footprints that soon disappear as if they had never existed.

Sensing that the vision had been nothing more than a mirage, I turn the key and the car starts moving again. I look at the empty seat next to me.

However, as I move along with the breeze ruffling my hair, I sense I am carrying with me the elfin creature who had just crossed the Kalahari, a nomadic silent companion on the elephant's journey with whom I have trodden a soundless resilient path that has enabled me to face new days...

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# ENDNOTES

## ELEPHANT MEMORY; A SHORT NOTE

- 1 António Damásio, *Sentir & Saber*, Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2020, p. 115.

## INSPIRATION

- 1 Reference to the Cederberg paintings.
- 2 Online <https://africanrockart.org/>
- 3 This is the unifying name for two ethnic sub-groups — the Khoi and the San — who share physical and linguistic characteristics distinct from the Bantu majority. The Khoi (also formerly called Hottentots) are pastoralists, and the San (or Bushmen) are hunter-gatherers. In this work it was decided to designate San Art as the complete artistic collection produced by the Khoisan people since it was the San who travelled the most throughout the territory and created most of the paintings left on rock.
- 4 This is one of the oldest languages in the world according to some researchers and consists of a phonetic system involving different types of ‘clicks’.
- 5 See David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2004, p. 139.
- 6 Idem, pp. 139-157.

## CREATION

- 1 Andrew Schulz, «A tromba de um elefante pode armazenar até 5,5 litros de água, revela novo estudo» in *Green Savers*, 4 June 2021. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/a-tromba-de-um-elefante-pode-armazenar-ate-55-litros-de-agua-revela-novo-estudo/>
- 2 Asian elephants have only one.
- 3 It also includes a small part of Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
- 4 Online: [www.campbellstaton.com/](http://www.campbellstaton.com/)
- 5 Shane Campbell-Station; Robert Pringle, «Elefantes africanos começaram a nascer sem presas e a culpa é dos caçadores de marfim» in *Visão*, 10 November 2021. Online at: [www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abe7389](http://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abe7389); [www.natgeo.pt/animais/2018/11/como-caca-furtiva-esta-fazer-com-que-os-elefantes-percam-presas](http://www.natgeo.pt/animais/2018/11/como-caca-furtiva-esta-fazer-com-que-os-elefantes-percam-presas), <https://visao.sapo.pt/atualidade/sociedade/2021-11-10-elefantes-africanos-comecaram-a-nascer-sem-presas-e-a-culpa-e-dos-cacadores-de-marfim/>

## EXHIBITION

- 1 See Claude Guillot «Os elefantes na Insulíndia» in revista *Oriente*, N.º 2, April 2002, pp. 84-91.

- 2 Before the Common Era.
- 3 In Africa, Gabon is home to the majority of forest elephants, about 95 thousand, two-thirds of the total population, but the actual number fell by 80% in the last century due to poaching. See text by Yuhijit Bhattacharjee, «Gabão: refúgio frágil para os elefantes» in *National Geographic Salvar a Floresta*, May 2022, pp. 56-79.
- 4 «Anibal» in *National Geographic*, June 2022, p. 23.
- 5 Almudena Tudela; Annemarie Gschwend, «Renaissance Menageries. Exotic Animals and Pets at the Habsburg Courts in Iberia and Central Europe» in *Early Modern Zoology: The Construction of Animals in Science, Literature and the Visual Arts*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, p. 421.
- 6 Manuscript dated in Goa that is now in the Portuguese National Library, Cód. 414. Online: <https://purl.pt/1275>
- 7 Indigenous people of Aceh, a kingdom situated in the extreme northwest of Sumatra.
- 8 Nina Siegal, «When Rembrandt Met an Elephant» in *The New York Times*, 14 July 2021. Online: [www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/arts/design/rembrandt-elephant-exhibition.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/14/arts/design/rembrandt-elephant-exhibition.html)
- 9 It is a vacuum technique that consists of preserving an animal's body parts: the water of the body tissue is replaced by reactive plastics such as, among others, silicone rubber.
- 10 Online: [www.amivitale.com/](http://www.amivitale.com/)
- 11 Ami Vitale quoted by Luís Octávio Costa, «Um elefante pintado na rocha para não esquecermos as maravilhas deste mundo» in *Público*, 18 February 2021, Online: [www.publico.pt/2021/02/18/fugas/noticia/elefante-pintado-rocha-nao-esquecermos-maravilhas-mundo-1949814](http://www.publico.pt/2021/02/18/fugas/noticia/elefante-pintado-rocha-nao-esquecermos-maravilhas-mundo-1949814).
- 12 *Portugal Colonial, Revista de Propaganda e Expansão Colonial*, Henrique Galvão (dir.), Ano I, Suplemento aos n.ºs 7-8 de Set/Out. 1931, p. 17.
- 13 In the last few years, three or four pink elephants have been sighted. They have a loss of pigmentation called leucism caused by a very rare genetic mutation.
- 14 Carlos Neto de Carvalho in *Paleobiologia do maior animal que alguma vez habitou o Rodão*, 2012, p. 239. Online: [https://geonaturescola.com/ficheiros/rotas/1385634746Paleobiologia\\_do\\_maior\\_animal\\_Rodao.pdf](https://geonaturescola.com/ficheiros/rotas/1385634746Paleobiologia_do_maior_animal_Rodao.pdf)
- 15 «Animais selvagens entregues pelos circos devolvidos à natureza» in *Green Savers*, 20 January 2022. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/animais-dos-circos-devolvidos-a-natureza/>
- 16 The first resident of EHEES is called Gandhi and he arrived at the sanctuary on 14 October 2021. He is a 52-year-old Asian elephant who lived most of his life in zoos in Denmark and France. The project is still in its initial phase and only has room for three elephants,

but the team hope to manage to build more barns and extend their land to provide shelter for more. Online: [www.elephanthaven.com/en/home](http://www.elephanthaven.com/en/home)

- 17 Olivette Otele. *Europeus Africanos, uma história por contar*. Lisboa: Presença, 2022, p. 143.
- 18 By way of example, in 2017, the Portuguese Judicial Police seized and destroyed 1500 kilos of elephant ivory. See: «Mais de 1500 quilos de marfim ilegal foram destruídos em fábrica da Arrábida» in *Público*, 21 September 2019. Online: [www.publico.pt/2019/09/21/sociedade/noticia/1500-quilos-marfim-ilegal-destruidos-fabrica-arrabida-1887416](http://www.publico.pt/2019/09/21/sociedade/noticia/1500-quilos-marfim-ilegal-destruidos-fabrica-arrabida-1887416)
- 19 See Leila Henry «A History of Removing Rock Art in South Africa» in *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, South African Archaeological Society, Vol. 62, N.º 185, June 2007, pp. 44-48. Online: [www.jstor.org/stable/20474945](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20474945)
- 20 See Jeremy Charles Hollmann, «The cutting edge: Khoe-San rock-markings at the Gestoptefontein-Driekuil engraving complex, North West Province, South Africa» in *UWCScholar-ETD Repository*, University of West Cape, 2011. Online: <http://etd.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/handle/11394/2804>
- 21 Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg. In Drakensberg, the story consists of overlapping layers in a continuous narrative that began 45 thousand years ago when the San engraved their dreams in the rock shelters of Drakensberg. Considered today one of the biggest concentrations of rock art in the world, Drakensberg invokes the spirit world of the San, expelled first by the Bantu, then by the Boers and finally by Apartheid to the harsh and inhospitable lands of the Kalahari desert.

- 22 Attribution of characteristics to representations/figures that possess, simultaneously, human and animal characteristics.
- 23 Term used to denote a divinity or creature that combines the shape or attributes of a human with those of an animal.
- 24 One of the names attributed to the San according to Andrew Paterson; John Parkinson. «Observing and Painting Elephants: San Rock Art of the Cederberg Region South Africa» in *Hommage à Norbert AUJOULAT*, n. special, 2015, p. 13.
- 25 Andrew Paterson; John Parkinson. Observing and Painting Elephants: San Rock Art of the Cederberg Region South Africa» in *Hommage à Norbert AUJOULAT*, n. special, 2015, p. 1.

## ECHOES

- 1 Natasha Daly, «Turismo com animais selvagens, a dor que causamos» in

*National Geographic Portugal*, 11 May 2020. Online: <https://nationalgeographic.pt/natureza/grandes-reportagens/2163-turismo-animal-a-dor-que-causamos>

- 2 *Nana* was the matriarch of an elephant herd that was relocated to Anthony's game reserve and, initially, caused problems. The conservationist managed to establish a special bond with her and in this way saved the herd. The herd grew and since then have been living in his reserve. Further information in: <https://thulathula.com/lawrence-anthony/>
- 3 «Quinze feridos graves em tentativa de expulsar elefantes de campos agrícolas no sul de Moçambique» in *Visão*, 23 March 2022, Online: <https://visao.sapo.pt/atualidade/mundo/2022-03-23-quinze-feridos-graves-em-tentativa-de-expulsar-elefantes-de-campos-agricolas-no-sul-de-mocambique/>
- 4 «Elefantes morrem após comer lixo plástico em aterro no Sri Lanka» in *Sapo* 24, 14 January 2022, Online: <https://24.sapo.pt/atualidade/artigos/elefantes-morrem-apos-comer-lixo-plastico-em-aterro-no-sri-lanka>
- 5 Filipa Rações, «Elefantes são fundamentais no combate às alterações climáticas» in *Green Savers*, 24 January 2023. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/elefantes-sao-fundamentais-para-combater-as-alteracoes-climaticas/>
- 6 Stephen Blake, «Afinal, os elefantes podem desempenhar um papel crucial na salvaguarda do Planeta» in *Green Savers*, 9 February 2023. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/afinal-os-elefantes-podem-desempenhar-um-papel-crucial-na-salvaguarda-do-planeta/>
- 7 Yadvinder Malhi, «Large mammals can help climate change mitigation and adaptation» in *Science Daily*, 9 March, University of Oxford, 2022. Online: [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220309104526.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/03/220309104526.htm)
- 8 Stephen Blake, Op. Cit. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/afinal-os-elefantes-podem-desempenhar-um-papel-crucial-na-salvaguarda-do-planeta/>
- 9 *Idem*.
- 10 «Como o ecoturismo ajuda elefantes e pessoas a construir um lar» in *National Geographic Portugal*, Setembro 2018.
- 11 «Mistério desvendado no Botswana: morte de centenas de elefantes deveu-se a toxinas na água (e aquecimento global)» in *Público*, 21 September 2020. Online: [www.publico.pt/2020/09/21/p3/noticia/misterio-desvendado-botswana-morte-centenas-elefantes-deveu-se-toxinas-agua-aquecimento-global-1932342](http://www.publico.pt/2020/09/21/p3/noticia/misterio-desvendado-botswana-morte-centenas-elefantes-deveu-se-toxinas-agua-aquecimento-global-1932342); Phoebe Weston, «Botswana says it has solved mystery of mass elephant die-off» in *The Guardian*, 21 September 2020. Online: [www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/botswana-says-it-has-solved-mystery-of-mass](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/21/botswana-says-it-has-solved-mystery-of-mass)

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- 12 Pedro Reis, «Vender ou deixar morrer elefantes devido à falta de água na África Austral» in *Público*, 28 December 2020. Online: [www.publico.pt/2020/12/28/mundo/noticia/seca-prolongada-continua-matar-elefantes-africa-austral-agravar-conflitos-humanos-1944097](http://www.publico.pt/2020/12/28/mundo/noticia/seca-prolongada-continua-matar-elefantes-africa-austral-agravar-conflitos-humanos-1944097)
- 13 The data is not consensual but approximate and relative.
- 14 «África: Botswana quer devolver elefantes a Angola» in *FMF World.org*, 16 November 2020. Online: <https://freemindfreeworld.org/africa-botswana-quer-devolver-elefantes-a-angola/>
- 15 «Sobe para 22 o número de elefantes mortos no Zimbábue com infeção» in *Observador*, 2 September, 2020. Online: <https://observador.pt/2020/09/02/sobe-para-22-o-numero-de-elefantes-mortos-no-zimbabue-com-infecao/>
- 16 Helena Geraldes, «UICN classifica elefantes africanos como 'Em Perigo' e 'Criticamente em Perigo'» in *Wilder*, 26 March, 2021. Online: <https://www.wilder.pt/historias/uicn-classifica-elefantes-africanos-como-em-perigo-e-criticamente-em-perigo/>
- 17 Since 1990, the number of elephants in Namibia had fallen to around five thousand but it rose sharply after the introduction of a protection programme that was acclaimed worldwide. According to the Environment Minister, Pohamba Shifeta, the country is today (2020) home to some 28 thousand elephants. Given the growing conflict between humans and elephants but also to combat the serious drought that is affecting the whole country, the Government put 170 elephants up for sale. For this to happen and for the transaction to be authorised, the buyers had to guarantee that the requirements of CITES would be complied with both in the export country and in the importing country. See the article «Namíbia quer vender 170 elefantes para combater seca» in *Público*, 3 December 2020. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2020/12/03/p3/noticia/namibia-quer-vender-170-elefantes-combater-seca-1941650>
- 18 Rita Grossinho, «Falta de transparência pode ser um problema na gestão de fundos para projetos de conservação» in *Green Savers*, 23 March 2022. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/falta-de-transparencia-pode-ser-um-problema-na-aquisicao-de-fundos-para-projetos-de-conservacao/>
- 19 «Covid-19. Pandemia ameaça décadas de esforços da conservação da vida natural em África» in *Expresso*, 15 September 2021. Online: [expresso.pt/internacional/2021-09-15-Covid-19-Pandemia-ameaca-decadas-de-esforcos-da-conservacao-da-vida-natural-em-Africa-0f868c74](https://expresso.pt/internacional/2021-09-15-Covid-19-Pandemia-ameaca-decadas-de-esforcos-da-conservacao-da-vida-natural-em-Africa-0f868c74)
- 20 «A seca no Quênia está a matar os elefantes» in *Público*, 15 October 2022. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2022/10/15/azul/noticia/seca-quenia-matar-elefantes-2024106>; «Pelo menos 100 elefantes morreram por falta de água no Zimbábue» in *Lusa*, 11 December 2023. Online: <https://24.sapo.pt/atualidade/artigos/pelo-menos-100-elefantes-morreram-por-falta-de-agua-no-zimbabue>
- 21 «Elefantes e zebras continuam a morrer de sede no Quênia» in *Público*, 27 September 2022. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2022/09/27/azul/foto-legenda/elefantes-zebras-continuam-morrer-sede-quenia-2022027>
- 22 Jennifer Hassan, «Seca está a matar mais elefantes no Quênia do que a caça furtiva» in *Público*, 29 July 2022. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2022/07/29/azul/noticia/seca-matar-elefantes-quenia-caca-furtiva-2015478>
- 23 «Mais de 250 elefantes vão ser transferidos para parque no Malawi» in *Sapo Viagens*, 21 June 2022. Online: <https://viagens.sapo.pt/viajar/noticias-viajar/artigos/mas-de-250-elefantes-vao-ser-transferidos-para-parque-no-malawi>
- 24 Andréia Soares, «Clima vai agravar conflitos entre humanos e animais selvagens» in *Público*, 27 February 2023. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2023/02/27/azul/noticia/clima-vai-agravar-conflitos-humanos-animais-selvagens-2040393>
- 25 Online: <https://www.worldanimalprotection.ca/our-work/animals-wild/wildlife-not-entertainers/coalition-for-ethical-wildlife-tourism>
- 26 Online: <https://science.uct.ac.za/departament-archaeology/contacts/john-parkington>
- 27 Online: <http://www.cca.uct.ac.za/cca/people/pippa-skotnes>
- 28 Online: <https://uct.academia.edu/JoseManueldePradaSamper>
- 29 Common Era.
- 30 Victor Stoichita, *Breve História da Sombra*, Lisboa: KKYM, 2016, p. 136.
- 31 A combination of various technologies, such as thermal imaging cameras and magnetic detection sensors (for intruders/poachers or people carrying weapons or crossing ravines, rivers, boundary fences etc.), radios, acoustic fibre to discover where fences might have been cut, excavations, CCTV and PTZ cameras, among other new technologies that might be developed.
- 32 «Afinal os elefantes desempenham um papel crucial na salvaguarda do Planeta» in *Green Savers*, 9 February 2023. Online: <https://greensavers.sapo.pt/afinal-os-elefantes-podem-desempenhar-um-papel-crucial-na-salvaguarda-do-planeta/>
- 33 Data from 2024. Online: <https://www.publico.pt/2024/11/17/azul/noticia/50-anos-perdemos-90-elefantes-floresta-futuro-restantes-sombrio-2111377>

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