



PRESS RELEASE BY SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

MAY 2009

www.savetheelephants.org

Contact

Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton

Save the Elephants and Department of Zoology, University of Oxford

tel +44 798 140 3918

iain@savetheelephants.org

Jake Wall

Save the Elephants

tel +223 7454 6124

tel +223 6603 5042

walljcg@gmail.com

Vance Martin

WILD

tel 303-442-8811

vance@wild.org

WORST DROUGHT IN 26 YEARS THREATENS SURVIVAL OF LAST DESERT ELEPHANTS IN WEST AFRICA

A group of NGO's comprising Save the Elephants (STE) and The WILD Foundation (WILD) have been monitoring the last rare desert elephants in Mali in collaboration with the Malian Environment Ministry directorate for conservation - Direction Nationale de la Conservation de la Nature (DNCN). This unique herd of elephants is now in a desperate situation due to a drastic shortage of water, and we are launching an emergency appeal to save them.

The desert elephants of Mali live in the Gourma district to the South East of Timbuktu. They are the northernmost elephants surviving in Africa, estimated at between 350 and 450 in number. They have adapted to survive in the harsh conditions of the Sahel by migrating long distances in search of water and food but live on the margin of what is ecologically viable.

Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton of Save the Elephants has been monitoring their range since the mid 1970s. He says

“In the Gourma region of Mali are the last elephants living in the Sahel and they are northernmost in Africa. Their range has shrunk drastically since the 1970's due to climate change and overstocking of livestock which has degraded the habitat. These elephants have the longest migration route of any in Africa and move in a counterclockwise circle of about 700 km. At the height of the dry season there are

P.O. BOX 54667 · NAIROBI · 00200 · KENYA · TEL: +254 (0) 20 891673 / 890597 / 891335 · FAX: +254 (0) 20 890441 / 890596
E-MAIL: info@savetheelephants.org · www.savetheelephants.org

PATRON: HRH PRINCE BERNHARD OF THE NETHERLANDS, PRESIDENT AND CEO: IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, D.Phil., OBE
TRUSTEES: PROFESSOR FRITZ VOLLRATH (CHAIRMAN), FELIX APPELBE BSc Est M, SABA DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, MARLENE MCCAY, PETER HENDERSON, EUAN MACDONALD
UK REG CHARITY NO. 1118804



only a handful of shallow lakes left to them until recharged by rains in July and August.”

This year the water levels are extremely low in the Gourma region due to uneven rainfall in 2008. The most important of these lakes, Banzena, is the lowest it has been since 1983 when it dried completely.

Over the last few years a team of Save the Elephants and the WILD Foundation in collaboration with the DNCN have been closely following the movements of the elephants using 9 collars fitted with Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers. The collars transmit the hourly positions of the elephants three times daily via satellite link and give real-time information about the activities of the elephant herds.

On the 16th May, Jake Wall a scientist with Save the Elephants returned from the most important water source, Lake Banzena, on which the elephants rely at the height of the dry season. He found it almost dry.

“Banzena has almost completely dried leaving no more than 30 cm of muddy, sediment filled water. The elephants are now in a deadly situation as they wait anxiously for the rains to begin. Six elephants have died in the last couple of months from causes related to the drought conditions.”

“The situation is equally dire for the Touareg and Pheul herdsmen who rely on Banzena for their cattle and many cows are now dying each day from lack of water and the soaring temperatures which reach 50 degrees Celsius in the shade. The stench of rotting corpses fills the air and what little water remains is putrid and undrinkable by all standards. The normal peaceful coexistence between the elephants and herdsmen is starting to break-down and giving way to conflict over access to water.”

Very few options now exist for finding water and we are witnessing erratic movements further and further afield as they desperately search for water and forage.

“Small thundershowers last week left tantalizing puddles 20 km to the south of Banzena, enough to survive on for a couple days at most, but the herds are now being forced back north to the almost dry lake.”

At a dry lake bed 50 km to the east of Banzena, 6 bull elephants are surviving by getting on their knees and reaching for water with their trunks that is 3 meters beneath ground level and through a hole dug by the Touareg. Younger elephants who are not as big or as skilled cannot possibly reach these to hard to get at water points. The long distances, high temperatures and weakened condition will also take a heavy toll on the younger elephants.

Jake Wall says

“I have witnessed first hand how tough the situation can be for young elephants. Last year during a radio-collaring operation, I came across 3 elephant calves trapped in a

P.O. Box 54667 · NAIROBI · 00200 · KENYA · TEL: +254 (0) 20 891673 / 890597 / 891335 · FAX: +254 (0) 20 890441 / 890596
E-MAIL: info@savetheelephants.org · www.savetheelephants.org

PATRON: HRH PRINCE BERNHARD OF THE NETHERLANDS, PRESIDENT AND CEO: IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, D.Phil., OBE
TRUSTEES: PROFESSOR FRITZ VOLLRATH (CHAIRMAN), FELIX APPELBE BSc Est M, SABA DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, MARLENE MCCAY, PETER HENDERSON, EUAN MACDONALD
UK REG CHARITY No. 1118804



mud hole along with a half grown female. From the age structure it looked like they had lost their matriarch. Evidently, this young female had led the youngsters into a waterless area. They happened upon a shallow well dug by herdsmen for watering cattle and it appears that the elephants, desperate for water, tumbled into the well and all four were hopelessly stuck in the mud for three days. Our Save the Elephants team pulled them out one by one, but they were so weak that only the large female survived. She was radio-tagged and we watched her dash 80 km to the nearest water at Lake Banzena.”

Urgent action is now needed to secure water for the elephants until the rains commence as predicted in early June. Fortunately, two pumps already exist at Banzena for pumping water and can be used for helping the elephants. Save the Elephants, in partnership with the WILD Foundation and the Mali government, is appealing for funds for diesel necessary for their operation. It is not certain whether the water quantity will be sufficient and close monitoring of the situation is needed.

If you want to help us save these elephants please send a donation via our website www.savetheelephants.org



Caption: Four elephants trapped in a mud hole into which they tumbled when seeking for water. They were pulled out by the Save the Elephants team with the help of local people who joined in the effort to save them.

P.O. BOX 54667 · NAIROBI · 00200 · KENYA · TEL: +254 (0) 20 891673 / 890597 / 891335 · FAX: +254 (0) 20 890441 / 890596
E-MAIL: info@savetheelephants.org · www.savetheelephants.org

PATRON: HRH PRINCE BERNHARD OF THE NETHERLANDS, PRESIDENT AND CEO: IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, D.PHIL., OBE
TRUSTEES: PROFESSOR FRITZ VOLLRATH (CHAIRMAN), FELIX APPELBE BSc Est M, SABA DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, MARLENE MCCAY, PETER HENDERSON, EUAN
MACDONALD
UK REG CHARITY No. 1118804



Credit Mike Deutsch – Save the Elephants

P.O. BOX 54667 · NAIROBI · 00200 · KENYA · TEL: +254 (0) 20 891673 / 890597 / 891335 · FAX: +254 (0) 20 890441 / 890596
E-MAIL: info@savetheelephants.org · www.savetheelephants.org

PATRON: HRH PRINCE BERNHARD OF THE NETHERLANDS, PRESIDENT AND CEO: IAIN DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, D.PHIL., OBE
TRUSTEES: PROFESSOR FRITZ VOLLRATH (CHAIRMAN), FELIX APPELBE BSc Est M, SABA DOUGLAS-HAMILTON, MARLENE MCCAY, PETER HENDERSON, EUAN
MACDONALD
UK REG CHARITY NO. 1118804