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Scientists see depth of elephant feelings

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August 16, 2006

LONDON: An elephant has been captured on film as she struggled to help another who lay dying from the effects of a snakebite.

The astonishing pictures reveal the depth of compassion the creatures feel for each other.

Scientists at the Samburu National Reserve in Kenya recorded footage of Eleanor as she fell to the ground after being bitten. Another elephant, Grace, was seen calling out in distress and trying desperately to get the stricken elephant to her feet.

But the 40-year-old matriarch was too ill to respond and by the following morning she was dead. That day elephants visiting her body rocked back and forth or stood silently nearby.

It was a dramatic demonstration that elephants, like humans, show compassion after one of their own species has died. Although Eleanor was from a different family, Grace still came to help her.

The research team, from Oxford University, the charity Save the Elephants, and the University of California, will report the observations in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*.

Radio tracking and direct or recorded observations found that five families visited the dead Eleanor, showing a distinct interest in her body.

The study concluded that elephants were interested in sick, dying or dead elephants, irrespective of a genetic relationship: "It is an example of how elephants and humans may

share emotions, such as compassion, and have an awareness and interest about death."

Most animals appear to show little interest in the dead of their own species, although chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants have been described as being concerned about ailing or dead peers.

The study's lead author and founder of Save the Elephants, Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton, from Oxford University, said: "This behaviour in an animal species can be compared to human behaviour and indicates that such feelings as compassion may not be restricted to our species alone."

But the researchers observed limits to elephant compassion. Eleanor's calf died because no female would adopt and suckle her.

Telegraph, London

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