

Why elephants hate hill-walking

By Roger Highfield, Science Editor

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Elephants hate walking up slopes and prefer to stick to the flat, according to a study of their movements across the African savannah.

Using global-positioning tracking data, researchers have found that hills are a key influence on elephant movements and land use.

The findings of the study in northern Kenya, where more than 5,000 elephants roam, are reported by Prof Fritz Vollrath of the University of Oxford and Jake Wall and Iain Douglas-Hamilton of Save the Elephants, and appear today in the journal *Current Biology*.

Understanding factors that determine density hot-spots and corridors where elephants like to move is critical in securing safe niches for them in the face of human encroachment on their habitat.

The team calculates that climbing 100 metres would "burn" energy that would take an extra half hour of foraging to replace - or would need to be paid for by expenditure of body reserves.

The team concludes that large animals probably take a different view of sloped surroundings than lightweights, and that this is probably especially true of heavyweight herbivores, such as elephants, for whom energy replenishment can be especially time consuming.

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