

**MY TRIP TO MALI**  
**By: Daniel Lentipo**

**MAY 2005**



*A Sandstorm in Mali*

It was a fabulous opportunity for me and an exciting experience I had in my life, Terminating it as my first day of travel from Kenya in a remotest northern frontiers Districts of Kenya Samburu .It was a greatest will of Save The elephants to arrange the trip for me and making sure that my safety was highly considered. I started off in Nairobi Kenyan capital with a conscious send off by Save the elephants team headed by Dr Iain Douglas Hamilton who wished me a safe trip and success for the mission. Hence from there I started on my own. Personally I was abit nervous not knowing how I will make this journey on my own. But all in all I arrived in Bamako where by I was received by the American embassy personnel's at the airport with the Grouma elephant project members who took me around to sign my official forms for the time I will be spending in the country. From that point we picked our way directly to the field where the main work will now start .On 5-th -05 - 2005 was the date when I and the driver arrived in site at Inatafhene where they were camping. After my arrival we moved to a new site this time we were based at Banzene where it was believed that during that time of the year elephants are known to spent much of the time there on a famous natural pool where also the local bring their cattle's to drink water in the same dam.

**MAIN FIELD WORK**

As soon as we the set up our camp we rushed off with the team to the water point to wait for elephants coming down to drink. this was a risk part of the operation. But since there was no other option on the ground we hard to cope on this in the meantime, We reached the hideout about fifteen minutes before elephant came out from forest ,we waited patience until the group of forty elephants walked out on top of dunes. I could not imagine how efficient we will be to get the group on the plain ground of no tree to hide. But all the same I must say courage was the best tool planted on us to accomplish this mission since we were forgoing objectives for the success of this mission. Our main aim was to take main identity pictures to improve the identification of the original photo album comprising of the pictures that were taken by Emanuel Hema and his team one year ago. We sat on dunes waiting for more groups coming out until it was getting dark thus we hard to break for the day. Hence again we left the next morning quarter to 6:00 AM to reach them before they were coming out from pool again with the ideal of get more pictures as much as we can and also to try identifying them from the file if they were known individuals corresponding with the identification file. This time we missed the group since they had left already before our arrival to the site. We repeated this

method for several days since none other was possible for us. The next group we got were very nervous we could not even approach them they ran into a thick forest of which we had to follow them on foot and once we reached to the middle of the forest we had to give up since it was getting worse for us to follow them in when we don't see them in a densely forest.

### **AIMS IN THE FELD**

- (1) Helping on creation of new identification file on grouma elephant.
- (2) Collections of data in the field on the same formality as the Samburu one.
- (3) Help out in field on system of putting together various family groups and associated family members.
- (4) Making trials on excirsing different methods of approaching elephants in the field.
- (5) Teaching the team on how to age and to estimate between the Premature and mature adults. On trials sexing of various individuals were give priority and how to differentiate between males and females on new born calves.
- (6) Community guides were trained on how to age elephant in the field and recording of elephant sightings in their areas alliancing with the team for information. Field note books pens were offered by Emmanuel Hema the head of the project. The trainees were advised to collaborate with locals for any information related to elephants on their areas especially the herdsman.

### **ACHIEVEMENT**

Every field activity one is entitled to take is not possible it only determined by ones capability and enthusiasm. The mission was carried on with a common goal in mind thriving for success on carrying the cross. It was a matter of gains and readiness in giving once life to carry the

activity. The main objectives of the mission as mentioned above were put onto hypothesis

### Updating of new identification photo file

During my stay I closely assisted Hema on sorting of pictures taken from the field to produce a suitable identification pictures and co-relating the picture on different individuals taken in field to match the favorable ones. Thus we managed with Hema to get several new elephant putting them straight away into family groups. But still this process is still moving into different paces and lots of efforts have been put to make sure that this system is on the place formalities.

### Field data collections

This was an on going project that was done by Hema since his training from Samburu. He has been using same procedures has the one we use in Samburu as follows.

- (1) Tracking the routes and marking the way points.
- (2) Writing the GPS coordinates on field note book esp. elephant sightings known or unknown groups and also marking and writing the way point numbers.
- (3) Coming back from the field and transcribing your notes into the data sheet.
- (4) Note that in Grouma most of the observations are done on foot since the elephant are not used to cars. So it is difficult to detect their reaction or tameness towards you.

### Sorting of associations

We worked tireless with Emmanuel on the techniques of regrouping his family members and marching out individual on where they belong. And on these formats we managed get lots of families done mean while he will be putting them on during by my departure.

### Elephant approach trails

In every discussion one oath to take it involves advantages and disadvantages and it has to have an income to one who is taking it and involves one taking risk for its own benefits. During this period several methods of approaches were tried.

1. Approaching elephants with the cars. We tried this method at some stage of which we incurred several reactivity behaviour. Since the elephants were believed to dislike cars from the past, we on the ground tried this method and we recorded several behavioral changes. (A) in some conditions they did not mind our presence although as we approach closely to them they at most case run to hide on the nearest forest or bush. (B) Some cases you hear them breaking trees in a nearest bush but there always no access in seeing them. And as time goes by they will get used to cars. Thus these tradition need to be excised when necessary.
2. The second method tried was tracking elephant on foot. For stance this was the method we used in everyday basis. Although we were not really keen on following this elephants on foot due the though terrain. But in the long run this was the only methodology that made our work to succeed at the end of the day. Of which we were forced by circumstance on taking risk following wild elephant on foot in thick forest.
3. Field time table due to elephant habitant changes we worked on different land terrain and lived in different camps in different times as follows.
  - Banzena- from 05-05-05 to 16-05-05
  - Tinabuo from 16-05-05 to 11-06-05
  - Cerma from 11 -06-05 onwards

The above timetable shows areas where elephants have been seen during the start of the rain.

### Ageing and sexing elephants

During my stay in Grouma, I showed the team how gives variable ages in comparisons to different calves. Second the team was shown how sex and age newborn calves this was an easy going technique that the group was keen on putting much interest since last time in Samburu they were given a lot of attention on how to estimate ages. E.g. C91f OR F100103 Thus the group is ready to carry on this activity in the field without any problems.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To my concern I must say that I learnt a lot in Mali from the people I met e.g. the local communities through the process I made many friends. Though it is very shame full for me to forget the parties that contributed to my stay in Mali first and foremost the Grouma elephant project lead by Emmanuel and his team of which I spent with them two months. Second is the American embassy at Bamako and Save the elephants in Nairobi Kenya. To me personally aim so great full knowing that everyone played his/her role for the success of my trip and I thank you all once more.



*This elephant family was running away from the Turegs herdsmen at Bulel forest*



*Researcher approaching elephants at Banzena*