

Safety in Numbers When Elephant Bulls Crop Raid

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Group sizes in animals can be largely attributed to external factors such as predation risk and both social and reproductive opportunities. The group sizes of elephants for example change continuously throughout the year, with bulls moving in and out of



breeding herds, as well as breeding herds congregating or separating across seasons. Earlier reports on our traveling duo (Classic and Gower) clearly showed how closely bulls can be associated to each other as well. Although the number of individuals in bachelor groups of bulls are expected to be

low in protected areas, new research by Dr Patrick Chiyo and his colleagues in the Amboseli region has shown that bachelor groups can almost double in size when leaving protected areas to crop raid.

Elephant bulls are not expected to have any predators in the natural sense; however, during crop raiding events in local villages, humans become a formidable risk to the safety of these elephants. During the dry season when the nutrient intake of crops could be profitable to the bulls, the bulls cleverly adopt a safety in numbers strategy to enhance their protection against human predators. Although the chances of detection may be increased using this strategy, when interactions with humans are almost guaranteed in the surrounding crop fields, bulls seem to be more comfortable facing the potential human threats in groups than by themselves! It looks as if the 'safety-in-numbers' term is even applicable to the largest terrestrial animal today!

