

By Genevieve Swart



# Pack Your Trunk

khuluma's **jetsetter** of the month is: the elephant. Tracking the grey giants via GPS has shown they roam 10 times further than was originally thought

**did you know?**

Elephants are the only mammal that can't jump

Mac (pictured above) will go a long way for a woman. Each year when this bull elephant comes into musth he puts foot to cover about 200km in 10 days, trekking through the mopane veld from Kruger's Shingwedzi to Timbavati Private Nature Reserve. Mac's dating odyssey is famous – he's even starred on a BBC radio show.

'He mates with the cows where we are and then he walks back. And he does this year after year,' says Michelle Henley, who along with her husband, Steve, has been monitoring elephants in the area since 2002. 'He makes this incredible journey, and his total home range is over 5 000km<sup>2</sup>. So he's rewritten the textbooks.'

The Drs Henley, both ecologists, head the South African branch of Save the Elephants, a nonprofit organisation founded by Dr Iain Douglas-Hamilton with projects in Kenya, Mali and Gabon. From their base at Tanda Tula Safari Camp, the couple tracks elephants across the Greater Kruger National Park and into Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

'The main aim of our Transboundary Research Programme is to understand what drives elephant movements,' Michelle says. 'If you understand how an elephant moves between areas, how they use corridors, that's a very valuable data set that you could use to define conservation areas, or proclaim new conservation areas.'

Some elephants are tracked via hi-tech GPS collars, slung around the neck, weighing about 12kg. From this GPS data, researchers have made a startling discovery: elephants' ranges are far bigger than was thought. 'For instance,' says Michelle, 'the average for bulls is over 3 000km<sup>2</sup>, where using the old technology it was estimated to be about 300km<sup>2</sup>'.

The Henleys maintain an elephant identification database begun in 1996. Long-term monitoring is vital to understand a long-lived species – the world's largest land mammal may live to be 60 or older. The ID database contains 1 500 animals, chiefly recognised by the holes, nicks and tears in their ears or, if the edges are smooth, the unique pattern of veins in the ears.

'If a person submits a good photo of the left and right ear of an elephant, then they can usually name that animal if we don't have it on file already,' Michelle says. Ellie monikers so far include Napoleon, Classic and Intwandamela – 'he who greets you with fire in his eyes' – after the bull charged visitors following him on foot.

There is a way to guarantee naming rights: sponsor a GPS collar (R25 000). The Henleys also provide a Google Earth link, so you'll always know when 'your' elephant, like Mac, goes a-wandering.

## Q&A with Dr Michelle Henley



**What attracted you to elephants?** They've got – especially the females – a very tight-knit social structure. They're intelligent, sentient beings.

**What amazing things have you seen in the bush?**

A new little calf that's just been born and how the mother cares for it – that's always incredible. We've had some fantastic experiences seeing old bulls meet up. They have these elaborate greeting ceremonies where each animal puts the trunk up in the other's mouth, and they can sometimes stand half-an-hour to an hour with their foreheads together, just stroking the sides of their heads.

**What elephant secrets can you share?** We've been fortunate to see how they pick up the bones of a dead relative and just stand there for hours.

**Have you had any close shaves?** Not to the level Steve has. He's had a big musth bull try to pick up the research vehicle, which at that stage was a tiny little Suzuki jeep. He put his tusks under the bull bar and tried to tip it backwards. Steve banged on the door and started shouting, which startled him, and he dropped it. Now we've got a Land Rover, but I'm sure an elephant could tip it if he wanted to. But at least you don't feel as if you're in a dinky toy.

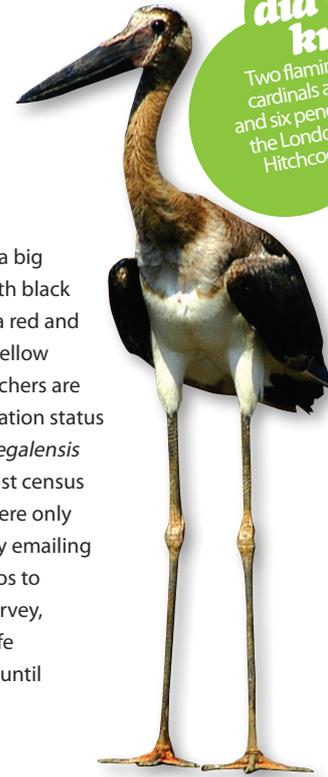
**What's your stand on the legal ivory trade?** We are totally against the trade in ivory because it puts the rest of Africa's elephants in jeopardy.



## Elephants You'll Never Forget

Guests at Tanda Tula Safari Camp can visit the Save the Elephants research centre, listen to presentations and chat to the Henleys about the incredible work they're doing. 'We're also going to be taking people out to track elephants with us on set days,' says Michelle. [www.savetheelephants.org](http://www.savetheelephants.org) Tanda Tula offers accommodation in 12 East African-styled luxury tents with traditional Victorian bathtubs, private decks and views of the Nlharalumi river bed. Children over eight are welcome. Rates are R4 700 per person sharing a night (1 October – 30 April) and R3 450 pps (1 May – 30 September), including all meals, soft drinks, beers, house wines and spirits, and game activities. [www.tandatula.co.za](http://www.tandatula.co.za)

## Have You Seen This Stork?



**did you know?**

Two flamingos, 50 red cardinals and starlings, and six penguins attended the London premiere of Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

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On Sundays, take a walk in the park with a difference. Melville Koppies Nature Reserve may be Egoli's green belt but it's no place for manicured lawns. The reserve between Melville and Emmarentia is run by volunteers who believe wild is best. 'We remove aliens and let nature take over,' says Wendy Carstens, head of Melville Koppies management committee. To some people, it then seems unkempt, but that is how it should be. Through much hard work, most alien vegetation has been removed, so tamvrug, wild apricot and mountain silver oak once again flourish on the 9.2-billion-year-old quartzite ridges. On guided tours, you and your peeps can learn about the reserve's flora, fauna, geology, archaeology and history. Adults R30/children R10. [www.mk.org.za](http://www.mk.org.za)