

ELEPHANTS ALIVE

Working to save our elephants

BY MICHELLE HENLEY

Our research in the Associate Private Nature Reserves (APNR) officially commenced in 2003 as Save the Elephants – South Africa, and draws on data collected over almost two decades. Although our name recently changed to Elephants Alive, all our activities remain the same. Our quest involves delivering research solutions which acknowledge elephants as an integral part of the ecosystem they occupy. We work towards achieving a greater understanding of the complex relationships that elephants have with each other and their surroundings, including the people with whom they share their world.

In the past couple of months we have refitted the collars of some of our long-term study animals. Maintaining tracking datasets on a long-lived species such as elephants provides vital information on range expansion movements over time. Soshangane, who we first collared in 2009, was recollared in November last year. Umbabat, a cow from the Parks Herd, was recollared on 3 June 2015 after having worn her collar for seven years. Thanks to Patrick Anderson from Jejane who reported a sighting of General, we were able to recollar this individual on 12 June 2015 after his collar had failed prematurely in 2012. We are very grateful for the professional assistance received from the wardens Craig Spencer (Balule), Colin Rowles (Klaserie) and Glen Thomson (Jejane) respectively. We are still on the lookout for some elephants to replace their collars and would appreciate any sightings in this regard.

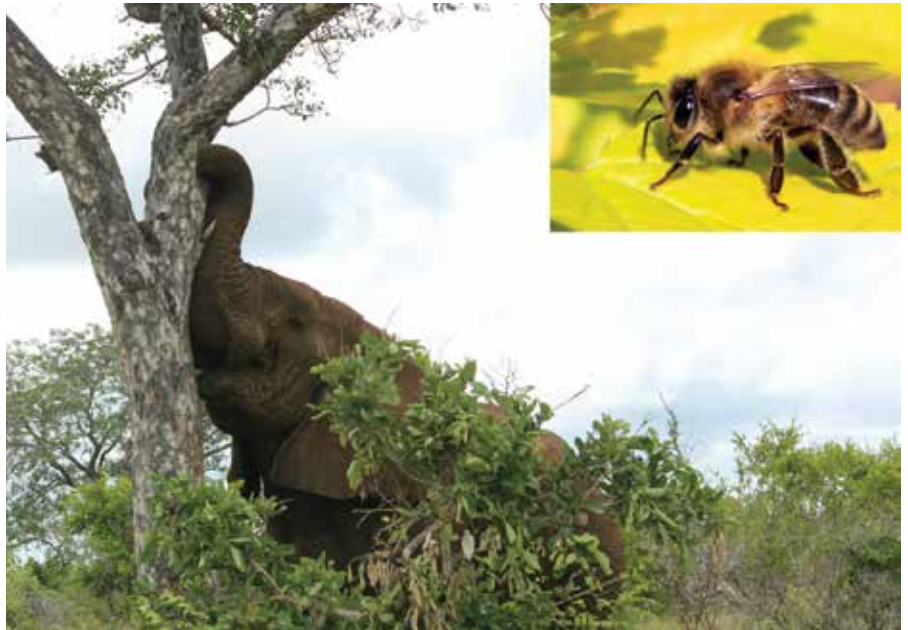
Other than collaring elephants to understand how habitat resources, the need for safety and social benefits drive their movements, we also link elephant occurrence to their effects on the vegetation and infrastructure where elephants and man co-exist. We have a long-term monitoring programme in



ALERT, drawn by Michelle Henley

place where more than 3 000 large trees are individually monitored throughout the APNR for elephant impact over time and their possible effect on large tree nesting birds such as vultures and raptors. We

experiment with mitigation methods to protect large trees and are excited to announce a new avenue of research which will be conducted concurrently with our existing wire-net protection study. Robin Cook will undertake this research for his MSc and will use African honeybees to prevent elephants from impacting iconic marula trees. Research in Kenya by Dr. Lucy King has shown that elephants appear to have an evolved fear for the African honeybee, avoiding crop fields surrounded by beehives. We therefore plan to place beehives in marula trees to explore whether elephants will avoid these trees because of the possible presence of honeybees. If the beehives are successful at preventing elephants from affecting marula trees, we will then be able to provide a new non-lethal tool for managing elephant impacts on specific trees. This project has the further potential to encourage beekeeping across protected areas, as well as providing honey as an added benefit. The study will be conducted on Jejane Private Nature Reserve.



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