

The earlier story, 'The Absent Elephant', about young forest elephants, has been reformatted and rewritten and appears below under its new title "Encounters with the African Forest Elephant", September 2019.

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Encounters with the African Forest Elephant

*This short story introduces the reader to the little known African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), two young females of which were kept in the Zoological Garden at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in the 1960s and subsequently. The author had not even seen a living forest elephant before this story begins and he 'discovered' the two females in the Zoo only after he had arrived there. At the time of writing (August 2019) it seems that a lone female in a Japanese zoo is probably the only representative of the African forest elephant in any zoo outside the African continent. The forest elephant, one of only three species of elephant on the planet, is increasingly threatened by human activities in the remaining tropical forests of Africa.*

by Bob Golding

One day, in October 1976, I found myself high in the skies above Africa's Sahara Desert. Nearly seven miles high in fact. Even from that height the particular patch of the earth's surface below me looked a little scary. It looked dry, remote and wild, with no sign of human presence or activity. As I moved slowly across it, the colours of the land varied, from rust red to golden brown with quite a few shades in between. Every now and then I could make out what seemed to be areas with jagged shadows cast by rocky outcrops that might have



Young female African forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) at the University of Ibadan Zoo.

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been hills or mountain tops. I gazed down but recognised very little of what I could see, just an endless, distant, starkly beautiful landscape.

I was sitting in a very comfortable seat in a large jet airplane, the sort of airplane used to transport thousands of passengers around the planet every day, perhaps on business or for a faraway vacation. The aircraft was flying roughly north - south, having started its journey in London, and was now heading down to Lagos in Nigeria, West Africa. This flight was quite different, though, from any I had experienced before. For example, there was a complete absence of the usual sounds from within the aircraft - no squeals or shouts from bored or hungry children, no clattering crockery from rickety food trolleys, no sudden blasts from invisible loudspeakers, not a human voice to be heard. The members of the flight crew were in their cabin up in the nose of the aircraft somewhere, but I could neither see nor hear them. There was just the steady, subdued, background roar of the four jet engines.

In fact I was sitting, quite alone, within the bowels of a large cargo aircraft, surrounded by stacks of large crates and an assortment of other packages. With the exception of my own seat there were no seats of any kind to be seen, and most of the fittings and fixtures, such as overhead luggage racks and clusters of toilets that take up room in a passenger aircraft, were also missing. The result was what seemed to be a single, cavernous space, a flying warehouse, and it was stacked with machinery, equipment and crates containing all kinds of cargo. There were refrigerators, electric generators, television sets and Heaven knows what else packed onto that airplane. It was rather like sitting in an airborne British Home Store that had been plucked from a city trading estate somewhere.

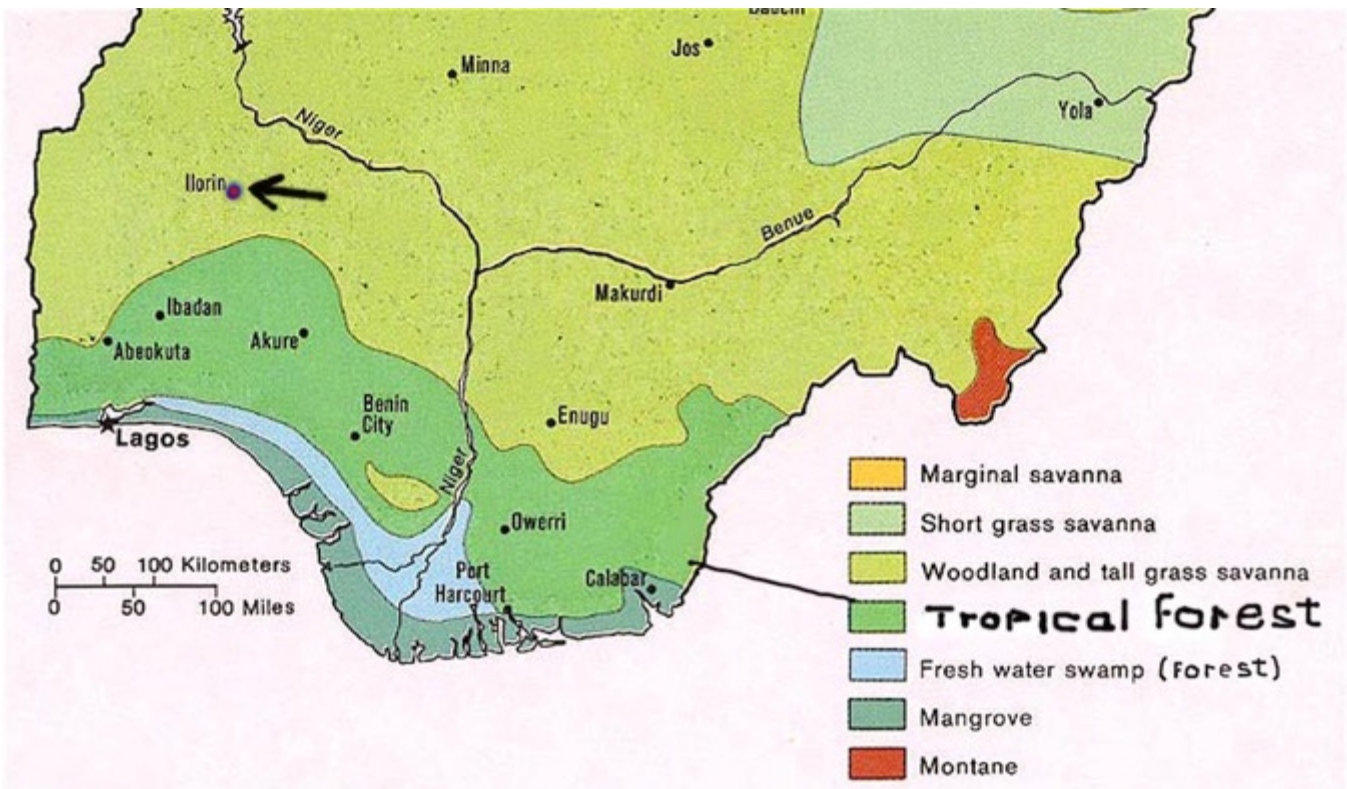
My solitary seat was positioned against the left side of the aircraft, next to a window; I had been told it was for my use only which seemed a superfluous comment as there was not another passenger in sight, not a soul to be seen. If, during a flight, you like to talk to your fellow passengers sometimes, or chat up the stewardesses - or stewards for that matter - this was not the place to be.

Sadly, I wasn't enjoying the flight. Something was missing from the goods and merchandise stacked around me, something I had flown to London specifically to collect and take back with me to Nigeria, something I had decided, at the last minute, and with a heavy heart, to leave with colleagues at Luton airport in London.

That something was a wooden crate containing a young African elephant.

The background to my lonely journey across the African skies had its rather complicated roots back at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and, specifically, in the University Zoological Garden where I was Curator. Thus before continuing this story, dear reader, I feel it would be helpful if I digress and take you back through some of the events that led to my being on an airplane with an absent elephant.

In 1963, just three years after Nigeria's independence, what was soon to develop into the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden was a small teaching and research collection of indigenous wild animals that had been acquired by the University's Department of Zoology. The included a few species of monkey, porcupines, hyraxes, birds such as owls and a solitary secretary bird and one or two non-venomous snakes, mostly housed in small, old



Showing the original tropical forest zone in southern Nigeria and its presumed northern limit (green / yellow interface on map). Most of the forest has now been felled. The two forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) at the University of Ibadan Zoo were taken when very young from two separate areas north of Ilorin.

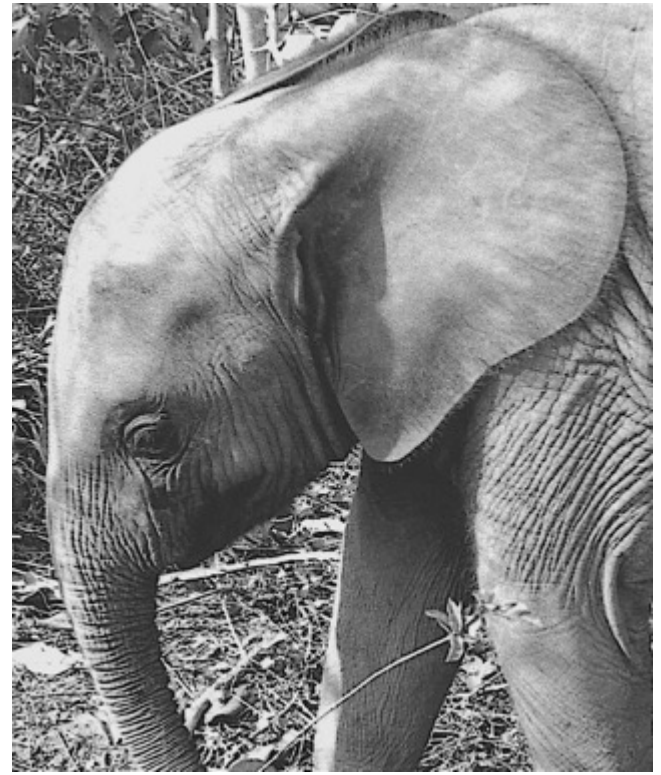
fashioned cages. On a trial basis, the Nigerian public had recently been given supervised access to this area so they could take a look at the animals.

The University administrators were surprised at the level of interest shown by the public and decided to advertise in the UK and elsewhere for a suitable person to develop the teaching collection into a full-time, educational zoological garden open to the public. At my home in Bristol I happened to see the ensuing advertisement in the London Daily Telegraph. I applied for the post, was invited to an interview in London, appointed and commenced work in Nigeria in September 1963.

During my term of office at the Zoo from 1963 to 1979, initially as Curator, the University administration decided to separate the Zoo from the Department of Zoology and redesignate it an independent Public Service Unit. As such the Zoo became responsible, under a newly appointed Director (yours truly), to a newly-established Zoo Management Board chaired by the Dean of the University's Faculty of Science.

The animals in the University of Ibadan Zoo originated largely from wild specimens brought there randomly by hunters and others or, in some cases, transported from much further afield in Nigeria and occasionally from outside Nigeria. For example, our two young gorillas were transported - illegally - from Cameroon, and we imported pygmy hippos and one of the elephants in this story quite legitimately from the UK.

In 1965 the Zoological Garden attracted somewhere around 30,000 visitors annually. Public interest grew rapidly and the number of visitors increased each year. In 1970 the number of visitors rose to to 158,000 and when I left my post in 1979 the figure was just under 250,000, more visitors than attended any other public attraction of any kind in Nigeria.



Left *Loxodonta africana* and right *Loxodonta cyclotis*. Both are young females. Note that the lower external ear lobe or pinna of *L. africana* is more angular and extends further forward than that of *L. cyclotis* which has a generally smaller and more rounded pinna. The distance between the eye and the external auditory canal is proportionately greater in *L. cyclotis* which also has a longer and narrower mandible, a tendency to hold the head lower and the higher number of toe nails mentioned elsewhere.

The popular appeal of the Zoo and the great interest shown in it by the general public at all levels was, I believe, due to it offering an opportunity to Nigerian visitors, in many cases for the first time, to view a range of animal species at close quarters while in complete safety. The Zoo became a wildlife centre where visitors could learn something about the wildlife of Nigeria and its conservation. It was visited by many school parties. The Zoo trained and developed a team of animal care staff, some of whom became outstandingly good zoo keepers and animal handlers by any standard. There were also maintenance workers, gardeners, a driver for our zoo vehicle, gate keepers, an accountant, a secretary and others.

As the title of this story suggests, two African forest elephants at the University of Ibadan Zoo are the main focus of this story, as well as some of the interesting and even sad events and developments that arose because of them. When I took up my post in Nigeria in 1963, a young, female, orphaned African forest elephant named Dora was already resident in the Zoo. She had been acquired a year or so earlier as a very young animal from a location north of Ilorin (see map page 3). The elephant's mother had been killed by 'poachers' or 'hunters' although few details were available. However, the young animal was soon confiscated by wildlife officers and sent to the Zoo in Ibadan where she was successfully hand raised. Soon after my arrival a second female forest elephant, later named Bodunrin by zoo staff, was brought to the Zoo, again by a wildlife officer, but this time from the Upper Ogun area, also north of Ilorin. The animal was only two or three weeks old on arrival. Her mother had also been killed by 'poachers' but, again, details were unclear. Despite some initial difficulties with its diet, this youngster was also successfully hand raised by zoo staff and volunteers. I should make it clear that both young elephants were deposited in the University Zoo with the knowledge and approval of Nigerian government wildlife personnel.

Soon after arriving in Ibadan I began to gather more information on what was generally referred to as the forest elephant. It was described as being smaller in size than the grassland or savanna elephant (the version of the African elephant usually exhibited by zoos and wildlife parks), of having a longer and narrower mandible, of holding its head at a lower angle, having straighter tusks that point downward, having a more rounded head in profile, more rounded external ears that cover a smaller area of the head, and having five well defined toe nails on each front foot and four on each back foot.

When I saw our forest elephant, Dora, for the first time and, a little later, the newly arrived Bodunrin, I could see that each closely matched the description of the forest elephant set out above although, of course, certain features could not be used for identification purposes at the time because the animals were very young. The differences in appearance between these two elephants and other African elephants I had observed or photographed elsewhere, and which almost certainly had come from a grassland area of Africa, were also clear to see.

The common name 'forest elephant' has, it seems, been used for some time in West and Central Africa to describe the elephant 'type' native to the tropical forests of that region; the name 'savanna elephant' has been used for the 'type' found in the open grasslands, not only of Nigeria but of much of Africa. Both common names are still in regular use.

With regard to the classification and scientific name of the African forest elephant, I can only report on the most recent conclusions of taxonomists and other scientists. Forest and savanna elephants were at one time grouped together as a single species. Then they were declared to be two different sub species. More recently, further research concluded that the savanna elephant and the forest elephant had been separated for nearly three million years and are different species. The African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the African savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) have been accepted as separate species since then. Together with the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) there are thus just three species of elephant on the planet.

It seems that the African forest elephant has been exhibited in zoos outside Africa only occasionally and that currently there may be just a single specimen in a Japanese zoo. A small number have been kept in African zoos although those zoos may have been located within, or close to, the elephant's natural range and the elephants acquired casually.

As forest elephants, there was something very special about Dora and Bodunrin. I was intrigued and delighted to have them in the Zoo and to be able to provide a good standard of care, including veterinary care, and the opportunity for our zoo visitors to observe an elephant at close quarters and in complete safety.

So what is the future of the wild African forest elephant in Nigeria? Most of southern Nigeria was once covered with tropical forest. According to the UN, Nigeria lost nearly 80 per cent



Photograph of a molar tooth of an African elephant, almost certainly *L. africana*.

Drawing of the lower jawbone of an African elephant showing two molar teeth, one on each side.

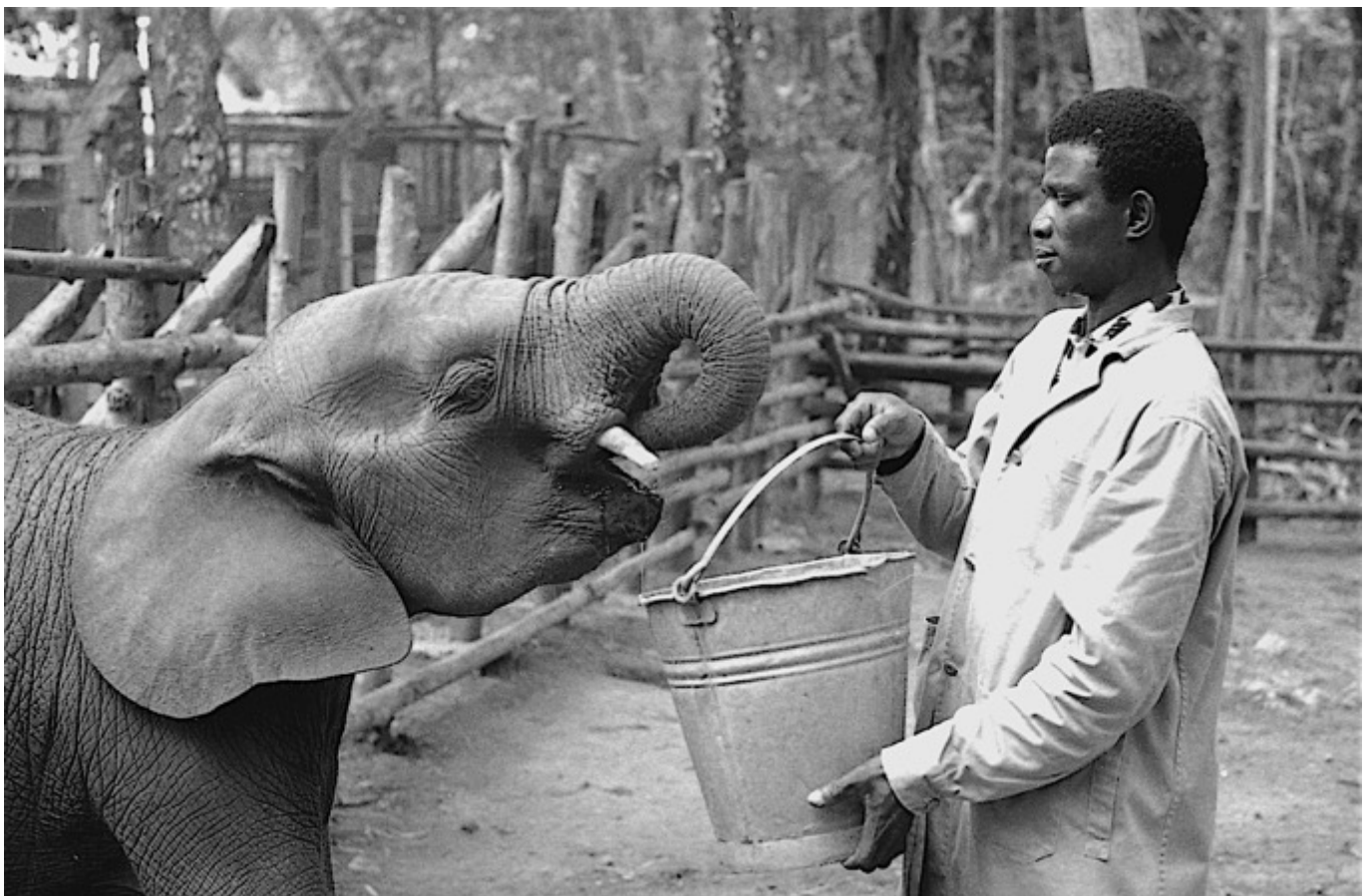


of its old-growth forests between 1990 and 2005, the highest deforestation rate of natural forest on the planet during that period. The Nigeria Conservation Foundation has stated that the forest was cut down at world record rates between the early 1920s and 2006 when action began to stop its obliteration; the Foundation attributed the rapid rate of felling to high human population growth rates, conversion for subsistence and industrial agriculture, and logging. In the 1960s small areas of forest still remained in southern Nigeria, but felling continued at a fast rate and whatever remains of tropical forest in Nigeria in 2019 continues to decline rapidly. It is presumably possible, however, that small numbers of forest elephants remain in Nigeria although not necessarily in areas of forest.

The capture locations in Nigeria, as well as the circumstances of capture, of the two young forest elephants at the University Zoo, were, I suggest, not entirely surprising. Much of southern Nigeria had, by the time of their capture, been cleared of forest; the remaining forest continued to be felled rapidly and a diminishing population of forest elephants may have been moving slowly northward into the savanna zone while continuing to be pursued and killed by 'hunters'. One can only conjecture...

With regard to the future of the wild African forest elephant, a research project carried out a few years ago highlighted a further concern. A report states that not only is it more than 20 years before the females can reproduce but that they give birth only once every five to six years. This reproduction rate means that population growth is around three times slower than that of the savanna elephant.

I remember that many of the people working in Nigeria who were in some way involved with the country's natural resources were pessimistic about the future of the forest elephant in



Dora being given a drink by the zoo's head keeper, Daniel Osula. 1964.

Nigeria. During the mid 1970s it was suggested by a small group of interested parties that the University of Ibadan Zoo should explore the possibility of establishing a forest elephant breeding centre somewhere in southern Nigeria, preferably within easy reach of Ibadan, the University and the Zoo. It was thought that the new centre would have strong links to the Zoo and perhaps become a centre for elephant research in addition to participating in the captive breeding and conservation of these animals. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure sufficient financial support for this idea although it attracted much interest from those involved with wildlife conservation in Nigeria.

I have to say that, like everyone else involved, I was disappointed that these discussions came to an end without anything practical having been achieved. The establishment and management of a breeding centre for the African forest elephant in Nigeria would have been a natural extension of the Zoo's existing activities. Modern, well managed zoos seek to fill a number of related roles. These include the presentation of wild animals to the general public using techniques that interest, inform and educate; the captive breeding and provision of holding facilities for species endangered or threatened in the wild; the establishment of a hub from which scientists could, say, research the reasons for a species' decline in the wild; and participation in efforts to reduce or control that decline, including wild habitat conservation. The Zoological Society of London at London Zoo and Bristol, Clifton and West of England Zoological Society Ltd at Bristol Zoo Gardens are good examples of the way modern zoos fill all these roles and more.

Over the next few years both our young forest elephants, Dora and Bodunrin, did very well in the Zoo. Although there were initial problems with obtaining the food products necessary



Forest elephants Bodunrin left, Dora right. The University of Ibadan's Zoological Garden grew rapidly as a visitor attraction and public interface and a sanctuary where the public could observe wild animals in safety. By the time I left there in 1979, the Zoo was attracting nearly a quarter of a million visitors each year, more than any other public attraction in Nigeria. 1964.

to ensure that Bodunrin's liquid food mix ('milk') properly balanced and acceptable to the animal, the situation eventually stabilised and a healthy young elephant emerged. We were fortunate in having access throughout the year to sufficient quantities of suitable, freshly gathered branches and green leaves, grasses, freshly harvested fruits, etc.

Both elephants were fit, active and inquisitive animals and they developed very close relationships with their keepers. Zoo visitors were absolutely fascinated by them and gathered around to watch whenever a zoo keeper spent time with one or both animals in their enclosure.

By the early 1970s it was clear that the present rather basic elephant accommodation in the Zoo would soon need to be improved and updated. It had been constructed before I



During an elephant's lifetime the several (usually six) sets of molar teeth grow forward from the back of the jaw (from right to left above). As the new tooth moves forward, what remains of the tooth in front is finally pushed out.

commenced working there. We would soon require purpose designed accommodation that enabled the elephants to be separated from each other and from the keepers when necessary and provide a secure holding area where a sick elephant could be isolated and treated. With the cost of the project in mind, I began to sound out some of the University's financial administrators with a view to putting together a costed proposal for improved elephant accommodation.

It was at that time, in 1973, that the first small pointer to what turned out to be a disaster waiting to engulf us

emerged in the form of what seemed to be a minor problem with one of the elephants. Whenever I think back to the occasion, my memory flashes up a particular slogan often seen painted in large letters on the front of some of the lorries or mammy-wagons that career around the streets full of passengers, bags of cement or bundles of freshly harvested plantain. The slogan warns that 'NO CONDITION IS PERMANENT' which, being loosely translated, means 'You never know what's around the corner, mate'.

One morning the elephant keepers reported that Dora was having some kind of problem with one of her small tusks. The tusk was obviously causing her discomfort and she did her best to prevent it from coming into contact with anything hard, even when feeding. The Zoo had an ongoing arrangement with the University's Department of Veterinary Medicine for the provision of its first rate veterinary services. I called them, described the problem and a vet soon appeared. Unfortunately, however, Dora could not be persuaded to allow the vet anywhere near her and she very successfully kept him at trunk's length as soon as she realised what he was up to.

After another day during which Dora showed no sign of improvement, it was agreed that she should be examined as soon as possible while under general anaesthetic and arrangements were made for this to be done the following day.



The elephant enclosure where Dora died. Note the enormous stand of bamboo that provided valuable shade (central dark area).

Early next morning, with the Zoo closed to the public, a number of zoo keepers and other zoo staff gathered around the elephant enclosure and looked on as one of the two vets present injected Dora with an anaesthetic. During the next several minutes Dora grew gradually less steady on her feet and a few of us followed her around, pushing hard against her when necessary to try to prevent her from falling over and possibly injuring herself. We also wanted her to go down with her suspect tusk on the upper side for ease of access by the vets. Finally, Dora's legs began to buckle and she sank, relatively gently, to

the ground. She then rolled into a natural position on her side, thankfully with the suspect tusk on the upper side. Pretty well perfect so far!

The vets immediately started their examination of Dora's tusk; they leaned over her head as they worked away, occasionally stopping for a brief conversation or to pace around the small, prostrate elephant as though trying to get a better angle on things. Everything seemed to be going well as the vets, quietly but intently, got on with the job. A huge clump of tropical bamboo nearby provided valuable shade and responded to the occasional light breeze by gently rustling its long green leaves at us as though whispering quiet encouragement.



Dora's death - the photo above was taken after the post mortem examination and while the butchers were dismembering the carcass on the left. The Zoo was closed to visitors that day!

Then... Disaster fell. In what seemed was the mere twinkling of an eye, our world crashed around us.

Dora, our forest elephant, died! She simply stopped breathing and lay dead on the ground before us! I could find no words that conveyed the impact of what had happened. Many watching were in a state of speechless disbelief. The vets were also shocked - and mystified.

The cause of death was never clearly established. The vets assured me that, as far as they were concerned, everything had gone to plan up to the time of death and that all appropriate procedures had been followed. It was suggested that the elephant was perhaps allergic to the anaesthetic or that there had been some other unexpected and unusual reaction to some of the materials used during the examination.

I had to decide quickly what to do with the substantial corpse and piles of elephant pieces and internal organs, including the enormous intestine. I certainly wanted the material removed from the Zoo immediately, before it started to decay, which wouldn't be long at those high tropical temperatures. As a matter of urgency I set about trying to locate some remote part the University campus where Dora's remains could be buried. Fortunately, I was able to do this very quickly.

But how were we to cut up the main corpse into smaller pieces without damaging the skeleton which I thought we might be able to have prepared later for use by the Zoology Department's anatomy students? Someone had the brilliant idea of trying to contact some of the professional butchers in town and employing them to do the butchering for us. My zoo driver and the head zoo keeper drove quickly to the main meat market in Ibadan town and soon returned with four professional butchers, each carrying a selection of wicked-looking knives. The men were astonished to see, at close quarters, what awaited them - a dead elephant, or 'erin' in the Yoruba language; quite a change from the hundreds of cows they slaughtered and butchered every week. Without hesitation, however, and using their huge knives, they began to cut the corpse into numerous smaller pieces as directed by us. They did this remarkably quickly and, when they had completed the job, all of Dora's remains were loaded onto a large, tractor-drawn trailer and taken away to the quickly-negotiated burial site on the University campus. I was intrigued to observe one of the butchers cut Dora's trunk into two separate pieces and then sit quietly on the ground, holding and gazing at them for a long time, as though mesmerised.



One of the results of the post mortem examination of Dora was a rare opportunity to view an elephant's exposed stomach and intestines. A function of the large stomach is to provides storage for the large quantity of vegetation consumed. The intestines of a male African elephant can be as long as 19 metres and the products of digestion are absorbed through the thin walls of the caecum which are supplied with many blood vessels.

While this clearing up work was taking place, I became aware of the great sadness that had descended on the zoo staff who had witnessed events that day. I, too, was deeply dismayed by what had happened as, in addition to the immediate and obvious reason for this, Dora's death left us with a solitary female forest elephant, Bodunrin, and the implications of this were far-reaching. The thought of Bodunrin living on her own, possibly permanently, was something I found unacceptable. Elephants are social animals and usually live in complex family groups where they interact with other elephants throughout most of their lives.

Before the death of Dora I had for some time been attempting to acquire a young male African forest elephant which, hopefully, I would be able to place with Dora and Bodunrin to form a compatible, potentially breeding, group; however, I had had no success with this whatever. With Dora's death, the acquisition of a companion for Bodunrin became more urgent and, of course, had a rather different emphasis. My feeling was that it was important to provide Bodunrin with at least one companion elephant as soon as possible and that, in the circumstances, we should be prepared to accept a female African savanna elephant to fill that role.

Despite making contact with possible sources of supply, I could locate no suitable elephants within Nigeria. It thus became necessary to search outside Nigeria as well as within it.

It took well over two years to locate, and negotiate the purchase of, a suitable specimen using the services of a respected international zoo animal broker. In 1976 this animal, a young, female, African savanna elephant from southern Africa, became available and was soon ready for its journey to London and then to Nigeria. This animal was not the perfect answer to our needs but I considered that Bodunrin would benefit considerably from the companionship and hoped that the new animal would fit into the arrangement without difficulty.

I have been asked occasionally if, in importing elephants from a different part of Africa, there was a danger of them escaping from our Zoological Garden into the wild and being absorbed into Nigeria's wild elephant populations, thus perhaps introducing unwanted genes into those populations. A comparison was made with the deliberate release into the south Florida countryside of many Burmese pythons, ex-pets that have now bred and increased in numbers and become a significant problem in wild Florida.

Briefly, the answer is that the two situations are quite dissimilar. In the case of the exotic pythons released into the wild by their irresponsible owners, these snakes are able to disappear into the tall grasses, scrub and waterways of south Florida almost immediately they are released. They live subsequently as wild snakes and are difficult to find, capture and remove from the wild habitat as well as having a very much faster reproduction rate than elephants. In the case of one or more imported elephants in our Zoological Garden, there was simply no possibility whatever of such large and conspicuous animals casually 'escaping', or finding their way through trading estates, across busy roads, through areas of dense housing, etc., without being pursued by zoo and veterinary staff, police, etc within a very short time. In any case, the nearest wild elephants were at least a hundred miles from Ibadan and probably much more.

We began to make the rather complicated arrangements to fly our newly acquired savanna elephant from southern Africa to Nigeria. For a number of quite unavoidable reasons we

first had to fly it to London and it was arranged that it would then spend a few days with a very experienced and helpful zoo near London, simply to break the animal's journey and to check its health. I was then to fly to London from Nigeria, collect the elephant, fly back to Lagos with it and accompany it by road to Ibadan.

Thus one morning I found myself, as arranged, waiting at Luton Airport near London. The truck carrying the elephant in its wooden crate arrived from the collaborating zoo on time, an hour or so before the aircraft was due to take off for Lagos, Nigeria. The crate was offloaded onto the tarmac, very near the waiting aircraft. The young elephant seemed relaxed in its crate and took food and water. I was assured that, during its short stay at the zoo, it had been kept in a temporary enclosure and had been able to exercise regularly.

As those of us involved in this operation, including people from the collaborating zoo, stood around the crate talking, checking paperwork and waiting for a fork lift truck to lift the crate up to the aircraft's loading bay, the elephant suddenly dropped down inside the crate onto her underside with her legs folded awkwardly beneath her on the straw bedding. She lay



During the UK school summer holidays, many children of the University's expatriate staff came to Nigeria to be with their parents - who were then quickly abandoned in favour of the elephants at the Zoo...

there for some minutes without moving. We tried in vain to coax her up. She finally tried to get up onto her feet but was unable to do so - she seemed unable to move her legs into a position to support her.

I considered the situation. Elephants mostly stand while sleeping although they may have different sleep patterns when very young. They also sleep while lying on their side, but usually for relatively short periods. In a prone position an adult elephant's body weight may crush and damage its

internal organs if in that position for too long. It was quite impossible to be sure that, in dropping to the floor of the crate, the elephant was seeking to sleep or rest or was actually unwell. No veterinarians were available within the time we had before take-off and in any case the zoo's vets had earlier declared the animal fit to travel. I remained concerned that the elephant still seemed quite unable to get back on its feet and It was important that, after the still remembered death of Dora in Nigeria, I should return to Ibadan with a healthy elephant.

I calculated that the flight from London to Lagos, time spent loading the elephant's crate onto a lorry and driving it up to Ibadan, would total at least ten hours and quite possibly more. After much thought I came to the conclusion that to consign the elephant, in its existing

questionable state, to another ten hours in its crate, was a risk I should not take. I thus decided to fly back to Nigeria without the elephant!

Our helpful zoo colleagues accepted this decision and quickly agreed to take the elephant back to their Zoo near London, get it out of its crate, assess the problem and do whatever



A final image of Bodunrin in April 1965, aged around 18 months; she was the younger of our two African forest elephants. I much regret that I was unable to find a male forest elephant in Nigeria or in some way put together a potential breeding group of these animals. As a last resort I was able to obtain a young female savanna elephant, Aduke, which at least ensured that Bodunrin did not spend the rest of her life in isolation from other elephants. These two animals developed a close relationship.

was necessary for its recovery. I had to get back to Nigeria as soon as possible and as my cargo aircraft was by now ready for take off I had just enough time to climb up into the aircraft and be shown to my solitary seat.

This, dear reader, is about where we came in, back at the beginning of this story when I was sitting in an airplane on the way back to Nigeria without the elephant. As I said then, I didn't enjoy that flight. I thought about the zoo staff and indeed many others who would be so disappointed not to have the new elephant. However, I had no doubt I had made the right decision in leaving the animal in London.

The plane landed at Lagos airport around the middle of the afternoon and, after going through the Immigration and Customs procedures, I found some of my zoo staff waiting for me outside the airport building as previously arranged. They had driven down the one hundred or so rather difficult miles from Ibadan and had with them a truck with which to transport the crated elephant back to Ibadan, as well as food and water to sustain it during this final stage of its journey. I

explained to them what had happened. They were, understandably, very disappointed. As I said to them, however, provided that the condition of the elephant was not serious or permanent and that the animal was found to be basically healthy by the vets back in the UK, it might well be possible to fly the animal down to Nigeria quite soon. And so we all left Lagos airport and drove the bumpy journey back to Ibadan.

A few days later I received a message from London to say that the elephant had been driven quickly back to the collaborating zoo and helped out of the crate. The animal did appear to be unwell and was examined immediately by the zoo's veterinarian. Blood samples were taken for examination but no specific problem had been identified so far. It was perfectly possible, of course, that the elephant was simply tired, or too cold, or too hot. Who knows? Chi lo sa? The important point was that the animal recovered quickly and, apparently, completely.

The happy ending to the elephant saga was that the animal broker who had arranged the purchase and importation of the elephant on our behalf was able to accompany it herself on a flight from London down to Nigeria a few months later. This time It travelled well, remained on its feet in its crate and arrived in Ibadan in good health. The new elephant was given the Yoruba name Aduke (Aah-doo-keh) by the zoo staff and soon settled down to sharing Bodunrin's accommodation. The two animals quickly developed a close relationship and gave every appearance of enjoying each other's company. They lived peacefully and healthily together until I left Nigeria in 1979. Although I had not previously been involved with elephants in such challenging circumstances, I felt that, within the context of the difficulties that had confronted us, matters had concluded reasonably well.

So, dear reader, I have come to the end of this story about my encounters with two African forest elephants, one of them (Dora) now long dead and almost certainly Bodunrin too - I am currently trying to obtain information on Bodunrin. As you will be aware, the events I describe above took place in the 1960s and 1970s and I left my job as Director of the University of Ibadan Zoo in 1979. Because of the discussions I describe on page 7 above about the possibility of establishing a breeding centre for the African forest elephant in Nigeria, I have kept a long-distance ear to the ground in case the idea re-emerged for meaningful discussion. To the best of my knowledge, however, this has not happened.

I am not sure how many wild forest elephants are still to be found in Nigeria. I am not clear either as to precisely how much primary tropical forest remains in Nigeria; some say none, others say a little is left here and there. When I was with Gerald Durrell in Cameroon, the country immediately to the east of Nigeria, I spent some time in primary rainforest, including a couple of nights in the middle of absolutely nowhere. My lasting memory of this is of stepping into a vast natural arena of overwhelming complexity and teeming with life. I recall the wonder of it all - the tall trees and dense, almost continuous canopy of leaves, the intermittent and varied bird calls resonating through the tree tops and the occasional burst of high-pitched, staccato mini-croaks from tiny tree frogs hidden away somewhere among the leaves.

I should perhaps add, however, that a tropical rainforest, while a place of natural wonder, is not exactly the Paradise on earth described by some travel writers; for most human beings it can be a be an uncomfortable environment to spend a lot of time in, at night in particular, when small invertebrates such as mosquitos attack non-stop from every direction.

I do hope that, one day, Nigeria will attempt to reinstate at least some of its tropical rainforest, perhaps as part of a decimated world attempting to recover its biodiversity. In the meantime I hope too, from far away and in my most surreal moments, that a patch of rainforest remains undiscovered and hidden away there somewhere, free from human contact and where the only herd of forest elephants left in Nigeria survives, undetected, undisturbed and living as nature intended.

Bob Golding

Bristol, UK, September 2019

Addendum, 20 September 2019, to the above article “Encounters with the African Forest Elephant”.

Shortly after completing the above article, two relevant events took place about which I, as a long-term supporter of well managed, outward looking zoos and similar organisations, wish to comment.

1) CITES Convention. In late August, 2019, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) made news regarding, among other things, its plans to put a stop to the practice of forcibly removing baby African elephants from their mothers and transporting them to zoos overseas, mainly in China. Often the mother is killed during the process of the removal of its calf. On the 27th of August, 2019, the London Telegraph published the following item:

<< Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

It will no longer be legal for wild baby elephants to be snatched from their families and exported to zoos around the world after Defra ministers persuaded the EU to vote for a ban.

African elephants in Zimbabwe and Botswana were previously allowed to be exported to “appropriate and acceptable” destinations. Under this definition, Zimbabwe has been capturing live baby African elephants in the wild and exporting them to zoos in China and elsewhere.

EU delegates spoke strongly against the ban last week at the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) conference in Geneva, arguing it would hinder the genetic diversity of elephants in zoos.

However, after heated backroom talks with Defra ministers, the EU performed a spectacular U-Turn and voted for the new legislation.

Now, the trade in wild elephants will be heavily regulated and only allowed in "exceptional" circumstances, and each case will be brought before the CITES committee.

Notably, the United States opposed both the original and amended proposal >>.

I welcome these developments. It should be remembered that, for several years now, a number of responsible zoos in the UK and elsewhere have accepted that they cannot provide certain important needs of captive elephants. Some such zoos have gradually, as circumstances permitted, ‘pooled’ their elephants in those zoos and safari parks able to provide better conditions and facilities for their animals. Consideration of this and related matters continues.

As far as the two young forest elephants in the University of Ibadan Zoo are concerned (see above article), they were sent to the Zoo as orphans by Government wildlife officials. We did the only thing possible and attempted to keep the animals alive and raise them within their country of origin. Earlier in this article I explained my reasons for the importation of the young savanna elephant to keep our (by then) single forest elephant company.

It must also be re-stated that the young elephants in Ibadan Zoo created considerable interest among zoo visitors of all ages who were able to observe them at close quarters, in most cases for the first time. They became a major attraction in the Zoo and provided

valuable opportunities for visitors to learn more about them and their country's wildlife generally. They were of considerable educational value at that time.

The Telegraph newspaper went on to report the capture and export of baby elephants in some African countries. While this trade is to be opposed absolutely, the number of elephants involved is extremely small compared with those lost for other reasons.

A few more items of related information may be of interest:

- Africa now has 352,271 savanna elephants left in 93 percent of the species' range.

- The Cites Census (see above), concluded that the African elephant population declined by 144,000 animals in just seven years.



This photograph of poached African elephant tusks, shocking though it is, provides the casual observer with a mere glimpse of the extent and nature of the horrendous slaughter of thousands of elephants in countries across the continent each year.

- The current annual loss of African elephants is estimated at 8 percent. That's about 27,000 elephants slaughtered year after year. Illegal trophy hunting and ivory poaching is the main reason for the decline in numbers of African elephants, often by people who sell elephant tusks on the Chinese market.

- Loss of wild habitat also accounts for the annual loss of significant numbers of elephants. As human numbers grew, people started settling in forests and that has also affected elephant populations.
- **NB - Forest elephants**, which are found in central and west Africa, were excluded from the census because they're nearly impossible to spot from the air. But a 2012 ground study indicates that these elephants, too, are highly threatened by poaching and habitat loss.

2) Public involvement. Over recent years we have seen increasing public concern about global warming, climate change and related matters. Issues include the destruction of the Amazonian and Indonesian rainforests, the melting of the Arctic and now Antarctic sea ice, acidification of the oceans and the rapid reduction in the numbers of countless species of animal and plant on our planet. Most scientists agree that most of these changes can be traced back to the activities of Homo sapiens.

Today is the 20th of September, 2019. Even as I write this, we are witnessing what appears to be a remarkable tsunami of public concern for the health of our planet in something like 150 countries around the world. School children, and adults too, have taken to the streets to protest against the failure of governments to address the issues with anything like the urgency they demand. It is being stated by the media that hundreds of thousands are out on the streets of their towns and cities; some sources even claim that millions of people are involved.

Today's mass response appears to have been triggered by a 16-year-old school girl named Greta Thunberg who, last year, held a solo protest outside Sweden's parliament about global warming and the fact that most governments were doing little or nothing about it. It seems that the image of this young girl on the world's television screens, as she speaks with quiet passion and eloquence about her concerns, has released an unimagined response from very large numbers of the world's 'ordinary' citizens.

Is it possible that, at last, young people in countries other than the more obviously developed ones are involving themselves in these matters?

3) **The role of zoos.** An important role of good zoos at this time is participation in the coordinated and managed captive breeding of endangered animal species. But are zoos doing enough to ensure that their visitors are sufficiently aware of the wider, background causes of the environmental challenges now confronting us and the urgent need for action?

The IUCN has told us that, even if we stop releasing more carbon dioxide and certain other gases into the atmosphere today, temperature increases, severe weather, wild fires and flooding will continue globally for many years to come. A recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states that we have only 12 years left to avoid catastrophic climate change. It appears that the majority, quite possibly a large majority, of respected scientists in relevant disciplines accept global warming as fact and confirm that we are fast running out of time.

Yet many of the world's political, business and industrial leaders continue to deny there is any significant problem!

As a tribe, zoo visitors are likely to be particularly receptive to messages concerning the natural world. So it makes good sense for good zoos, with their combined access to hundreds of thousands - if not millions - of people, to do whatever they can to generate public awareness and concern about what is happening to the planet. It really does seem that we are running out of time....

Bob Golding.

Bristol, UK, September 2019

The earlier story, 'The Absent Elephant', about young forest elephants, has been reformatted and rewritten and appears above under its new title "Encounters with the African Forest Elephant", September 2019.

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