

Unit 2 Academic reading

The elephants of Samburu



1 Work in groups. Discuss these questions.

- 1 What do you know about elephants? Share what you know with your partner.
- 2 Look at the two photos of elephants. Use the words in the box to describe what is happening in each photo.

trunk (n) /trʌŋk/ the long nose of an elephant

tusk (n) /tʌsk/ one of the long curved teeth that stick out of the mouth of elephants

calf (n) /kɑ:f/ a young elephant (plural: *calves*)

charge (v) /tʃɑ:(r)dʒ/ to rush forward and attack somebody or something

- 3 Work in pairs. What would you do if you were visiting a wildlife reserve in Africa and an elephant suddenly charged towards you? Choose one option (A–C).
A Run away as fast as you can and don't stop.
B Stand still, wave your arms in the air and shout.
C Lie down, don't move your body and keep quiet.

2 Read *The elephants of Samburu*, a journalist's account of a close encounter with an elephant near a camp in a wildlife reserve in Samburu, Kenya. Which advice in Exercise 1 (A–C) did the three people in the extract follow?

3 Read the text again and decide if these statements are true (T), false (F) or if the information is not given (NG). Then compare your answers with a partner.

- 1 Samburu elephants live more peacefully with humans than elephants in other parts of Africa.
- 2 It was difficult for the journalist to persuade Douglas-Hamilton to climb the two hills.
- 3 Other people had been attacked by elephants when out walking in the same area.
- 4 Mwaniki was the first person to notice that the female elephant had returned.
- 5 Douglas-Hamilton stopped running because he knew a way to frighten the elephant.
- 6 The journalist was close enough to see everything that happened to Douglas-Hamilton.
- 7 As the elephant paused in her attack, the journalist ran out to help Douglas-Hamilton.
- 8 Douglas-Hamilton was very familiar with the elephant that attacked him.

SKILLS FOCUS: Understanding vocabulary in context

When you read, you may come across a word you don't know. Instead of using a dictionary to check the meaning, you can try to guess what it means. Here are some tips to help you.

- **Look at the immediate context:** the sentence it is in, words which come before and after it, the linking words that are near it. Does it seem to be a positive or negative word? Are there other words in the sentence that might have a similar meaning?
- **Look at the structure of the word:** noun, verb adjective, adverb, prefix, suffix, etc.
- **Look at the wider context:** the topic of the text, the whole paragraph.

4 Read these sentences from the text. Answer the questions (a–c) to help you understand the word in bold.

- 1 *They can be dangerous, but they prefer to avoid conflict with other big, dangerous creatures such as lions or people. Elephants are **herbivores**, after all, with no reasons to kill except defence, confusion, panic and desperation when their needs aren't met.* (lines 3–5)
 - a What kind of word is *herbivores* (verb, noun, etc.)?
 - b What purpose does the linker *after all* have?
 - c If elephants have no reason to kill then what type of food do they eat?
- 2 *In the Samburu area of Kenya they manage to live in the spaces between human farms and settlements with low levels of conflict – far less than exists in most other areas of Africa where elephants **range**.* (lines 5–7)
 - a What is the topic of this sentence?
 - b What type of word is *range* (verb, noun, etc.)?
 - c Is there another word in the sentence that might have a similar meaning?
- 3 *We walked only five minutes before we saw elephants ahead: a female one with two calves. We paused, admiring them from a safe distance until they seemed to **withdraw**, and then we went on.* (lines 17–19)
 - a What kind of word is *withdraw*? (verb, noun, etc.) Who is *they*?
 - b If the people *went on* does this mean they felt safe or in danger?
 - c Did the elephants move closer to the people or move further away?
- 4 ***Trumpeting** loudly, she charged ... The female **honked** again and kept coming.* (line 21, line 25)
 - a What does the word *loudly* tell us about *trumpeting*?
 - b What is a *trumpet*? What noise does it make?
 - c What does the word *again* tell you about *honked*? How can we link it to *trumpeting*?
- 5 *From 15 metres away I watched her lift him with her trunk and then throw him to the ground. She then stepped forward and **stabbed** her tusks downward.* (lines 29–31)
 - a What did the elephant do in the first sentence? What does this tell us about the mood of the elephant?
 - b What shape are tusks? Is the end of a tusk pointed or flat?
 - c Is the movement described as *stabbed* aggressive and sharp, or gentle?

5 Work in pairs. Find these words in the text. Using the strategies from the Skills focus box, decide what the words might mean. Then compare your ideas with another pair.

- 1 calculate risks (line 3)
- 2 winding (line 13)
- 3 mischievous (line 14)
- 4 a brave challenge (line 24)
- 5 backed off (line 32)

6 **Evaluating conclusions** Which of the following conclusions can we make after reading the extract?

- 1 Samburu is not a good place to see wild elephants in Africa.
- 2 It is best to observe elephants from the safety of a vehicle.
- 3 It is impossible to fully understand the choices animals make.
- 4 There are different ways to escape from an animal in the wild.
- 5 It is impossible for humans and elephants to live in the same area.

7 Work in pairs and compare your answers. Where in the text did you find the evidence to make these conclusions? Which is the journalist's main conclusion do you think? Why?

The elephants of Samburu

IT'S ALL ABOUT CHOICES. Elephants are smart, they know what they need, and they generally know where to get it; if they don't know, their mother or grandmother will teach them. They seem to calculate risks. They can be dangerous, but they prefer to avoid conflict with other big, dangerous creatures such as lions or people. They are herbivores, after all, with no reasons to kill except defence, confusion, panic, and desperation when their needs are unmet. In the Samburu area of Kenya, they manage to live in the spaces between human farms and settlements with low levels of conflict – far less than exists in most other areas of Africa where elephants range. The biologist Iain Douglas-Hamilton explained these things to me, both before and after the day I nearly got him killed by an elephant.

It happened like this. Late one afternoon, he stopped by my tent and asked: 'Want to drive out and see some elephants before sunset?' On this occasion I said: 'How about a walk instead?' I knew that travelling on foot within the reserve was usually not a good idea, but couldn't we at least climb the little hill just behind camp? Yes indeed, he said; and so we did. From the hill's rocky top we enjoyed a magnificent view westward, admiring the river winding its way downstream. Just north of us was a larger hill known as Sleeping Elephant. Have you ever climbed that one? I asked. 'No', said Douglas-Hamilton, with a mischievous look in his eye ... 'but we could.'

Thus we set out on foot toward Sleeping Elephant: two middle-aged white men and a young Samburu boy named Mwaniki, whom Douglas-Hamilton asked to come along. We walked only five minutes before we saw elephants ahead: a female with two calves. We paused, admiring them from a safe distance until they seemed to withdraw, and then we went on. Seconds later Mwaniki muttered a warning, and we looked up to see the female staring angrily at us from sixty metres away. Her ears were spread wide. She was nervous. Sixty metres might sound like a long distance, but for an elephant, it isn't. Trumpeting loudly, she charged.

I turned and ran like a fool. Mwaniki turned and ran too, but much faster than me. Douglas-Hamilton turned and ran – then thought better of it, turned, threw his arms out, and shouted loudly to stop her. Sometimes this works; some elephants only pretend to charge and can be stopped by a brave challenge. But this charge wasn't pretend. The female honked again and kept coming. Douglas-Hamilton turned again and ran.

By this time I had a 20-step lead and Mwaniki was gone. He ran straight back into camp and shouted: 'The old man has been killed by an elephant!' This announcement, though not yet true, brought people back to the scene fast.

Meanwhile the elephant caught Douglas-Hamilton as he tried to avoid her by running around a bush. From 15 metres away I watched her lift him with her trunk and then throw him to the ground. She then stepped forward and stabbed her tusks downward. Douglas-Hamilton's body was hidden by tall grass, and I couldn't see whether she had hurt him. Then she backed off about ten steps and paused. This was the moment, he told me later, when he had time to wonder whether he would die.

She turned away. She marched off to find her calves.

I ran back to Douglas-Hamilton, and to my surprise, he was only scratched, dazed and bruised. I felt all over his rib cage: no tusk holes. Between us, we got him to his feet. And then a dozen people arrived, running and driving from camp. Quickly we vacated the area, in case the elephant should change her mind and come back.

After the event there was much relief, much apologizing (especially by me, for getting us out there on foot), and much guessing to try to understand what had happened. We decided that this female must have been the elephant known as 'Diana'. Maybe we surprised her because the direction of the wind meant she couldn't smell us before we got near. Maybe she feared for her calves. Maybe she had been scared by a pushy male elephant, or a lion, just before we came along. Is there anything in the records on Diana, Douglas-Hamilton asked his researchers that would suggest an aggressive character? There was not.

Diana. She was 'just' another elephant: sensitive, unpredictable, and complex. Her behaviour that afternoon, though violent at first, had luckily changed. At the last moment she made a choice. She chose not to kill him. And no one, not even Iain Douglas-Hamilton, with all his expertise on elephants, will ever know why.

