

Elephant 'Funeral' Rights and Elephant Names

(There are two sections: the first is an incomplete typed article "On a hitherto unrecorded aspect of elephant behaviour which, however, is not unknown to Africans" and the second a handwritten list of elephant names in various African languages. There are no dates but were written by Charles Pitman, the first was likely to have been part of his proposed book of elephants; the "other known manifestations" mentioned in the second paragraph are not here.¹)

On a hitherto unrecorded aspect of elephant behaviour which, however, is not unknown to
Africans

An injured bull elephant which had to be destroyed in the Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda has provided one of the strange stories of wild life which reads more like fiction than fact, though it is a most valuable contribution.

But there are other known manifestations, referred to later, which are also in the nature of 'funeral' rites; for instance, when elephants bury beneath a mass of branches, timber, grass and other vegetation, etc., a corpse of their own species, a human being, and a wild or domestic animal.

An African Ranger had discovered the elephant about 8am lying asleep in the shade of a tree. Soon after, a large bull arrived and awakened the sleeper, and had then assisted the lone animal into the next valley – the journey of 400 yards taking them nearly two hours, with the big bull pushing from behind with trunk and tusks. It is doubtful if this assisted at all, as the injured beast was unable to put any weight on the left foreleg and could therefore only shuffle the right foreleg along a few inches at a time, before bringing up the hind legs. The constant goading and pushing from the companion had apparently induced it to keep moving until overcome by fatigue.

It was extremely laborious and slow method of progress, it had collapsed in the first bit of shade reached beyond the ridge. There it had instantly fallen asleep while the assisting bull had retired to water at a nearby wallow and to browse in the adjacent thick bush. But it soon returned and attempted to get the lame bull moving again. After only five yards the later had refused to go on and had lain down in the shade of a tamarind tree, where one of the Park Wardens found it at 2.30pm.

The elephant was sleeping soundly, its measured breath being interrupted at intervals by deep snores. Its eyes were closed, and its head was pillowed against the slope of mound topped by the tamarind. It was lying on its off-side so that the injured left foreleg was uppermost. With a favourable breeze it was possible to approach to within a few yards and what appeared to be a bullet-hole, which was examined with binoculars, could then be seen on the point of the elbow. There was no other injury. It was watched for two hours, during which time, apart from occasional awakenings, when it would blow with the trunk on the injured shoulder and waft the uppermost ear, it slept soundly.

Then it awoke, and after shifting its head and limbs for several minutes, slowly got to its feet; which it did without putting any weight on the left foreleg and consequently lurched forward on becoming erect, only saving itself from falling down by quickly shifting the good foreleg forward to recapture balance. In the

¹ National History Museum, UK, Pitman Papers, C82

next half-hour the animal manoeuvred itself around to face in the opposite direction to that in which it had laid down, and also moved five or six yards out from the shade of the tree.

After each forward lunge it paused for several minutes to rest and to blow dust on to the injured shoulder. It also reached about for the scant vegetation within reach of its trunk; before putting food into the mouth it was held to the elbow-joint for a few seconds. As it was almost completely immobile and likely to starve, even if the injury to the foreleg joint were not permanent, it was killed with a brainshot. Three bulls which had been within a few hundred yards (the nearest within 150) when the shot was fired and yet were not in any way disturbed, were then seen approaching. The nearest saw the Warden and his African companions leaving the body to seek cover and veered away with its tail and ears up. The other two unaware of the presence of human beings approached slowly along the grass-path, a tall bull with uneven tusks leading, and a young bull behind.

When within 15 yards the first bull caught sight of the dead elephant and stopped, uneasily swinging its trunk and elevating its ears. Then very slowly, it circled the body keeping a few yards distant. Having completed a half-circle to the downwind side of the body the bull again stopped, testing the wind with its extended trunk. The young bull remained behind the older, fidgeting unceasingly and looking at the body. The big bull then became aware of the human tracks and followed the footsteps (which were then five or ten minutes stale) forward foot by foot until it reached the corpse. There it stopped and with extended trunk 'felt' all over the wounded joint of the fallen animal's leg without once touching the skin.

Throughout this preliminary inspection the trunk was extended to the full extent, the 'fingers' at the extremity of the trunk were kept widely distended, and the trunk tip was moved to and fro just clear of contacting the dead elephant's skin. A copious flow of mucus dripped rapidly from the questing trunk all the time. The forelimbs, head and tusks of the dead animal were 'inspected' minutely with the trunk after which the elephant bestrode the trunk and tusks, so that the forelimbs were one side of the corpse's head, and its hind legs the other. All the movements were in slow motion.

Whilst stepping over the body's head, the elephant poised with each of its feet held over the tusks beneath, without actually touching them. After carefully lowering each foot in turn to find the exact position of the tusks, the foot was slowly lowered on to clear ground. Having stepped beyond the head, the elephant backed up slowly against it, and lifted one hind foot so that the heel just touched the upper tusk of the dead bull. It then turned round and returned to the near side, stepping carefully over the tusks and trunk in doing so, and again just brushing the tusks with the sole of each foot in turn.

The young bull had taken no part in the inspection so far, but stood a few yards away with extended trunk. It seemed afraid of going any closer. The old bull having returned to the near side manoeuvred until it was standing alongside the body, facing the tail. It then raised the nearside foreleg and rubbed the sole of the forefoot against the sole of the upper forefoot of the dead animal, surface to surface. It then returned to the tusks which it inspected slowly inch by inch, running the trunk back from the tusk-tip to the gum, and then following the source of the tusk up to the cheek-bone.

Taking a firm twist-grip with the trunk on the tusk about half way along the length the elephant attempted to draw the tusk, but relinquished its hold when the tusk would not give. It then took a fresh hold, employing its tusks as levers against the smaller tusks of the dead bull but again desisted, and placing a

forefoot carefully against the lower tusk of the body to pin it to the ground, pulled on the upper tusk without result.

Leaving the head-end of the corpse, the elephant started to slowly circle the body in an anti-clockwise direction. It was slowly followed by the young bull. Both animals kept close up against the body and moved it in slow motion, stepping carefully in between the limbs of the dead one, head to tail. It took some minutes for the two elephants to complete a half-circle to the furthest (dorsal) side of the body, where they stopped and turned to face the back of the corpse's head. They then walked a few yards away from the body, which necessitated the withdrawal of the watchers who, for three-quarters of an hour, had been within fifteen yards of this fascinating ceremony. But the two elephants continued to attend the body.

The next day the injured foreleg was opened, and three sharp splinters of wood were recovered from the foreleg joint; the largest five inches long, one inch broad, and three quarters of an inch thick. Both ends were sharp and jagged, and all three smelt strongly. They were embedded, separately, in the muscle hard up against the joint, pointing in different directions. It is possible the elephant had been driven on to a hard pointed branch when fighting or falling down a bank. The Head Ranger said he had heard of elephants removing tusks from their dead,

(The article finishes here and appears to be incomplete as it stops with a comma, see next page for part two)

Reading room requirements

Some AFRICAN NAMES & ELEMENTS

- Kisukili - Tenbo, Ndovu
- ACHEZI - LYEC
- KANANJANG } - ETOME
- PESEO } - BELONYOBET, BELEK
- SEREI } - ENJOVA
- Luganda - ENJOVA
- Rukyura - ENJOVA

(with variations, due to the pronunciation rather than 'language', as the name just might change from the speaking African. I have no living knowledge of Kenya or Tanzania.)

ZAMBIA (Dwell)

- BETWA - NJOVA
- Nyanja - NJOVA (teachers of - Nyungu)
- KAONDE - NJOVA

ndikana

Lozi (Central African Area) (Stigand and Lyell)

- LI-YAO - Ndenao (teachers of - Nakhula)
- Zulu - NGONI - NKLOVA (teachers of - Kunguma)
- LI-Kunda - NJOVA (teachers of - Nwasi)
- LI-Sanga - NJOVA
- LI-BISA - NJOVA (teachers of - Nakhula)
- LI-WENBA - Zofu (teachers of - Tondo didin elu xeno of elykat-then)

Africa Congo - ZAIRE NAMES (Fred Kap)

- IN Lingala - Ndjoku
- IN Katanga - Npolo
- Otetela - Ndjoku
- Kikuba } - Ndofu
- Ansikoto }
- Tshiluba - Nzevu, Kapumba
- Kisanga - Ngicfu
- Buanga - Nishoka
- Bukete - NKamb
- Tshikete } - Kapumba
- USA/Maputu }
- S Tshikete } - Djanbu
- Utoko Kua }
- Ngumba - Nboxigo
- Kitanga - Toku
- Azande - Abete

P.T.O

West Africa (Happold)

- Hamar - Guro
- Twi - Ewe
- Wolof - Nde
- Fulani - Nyer
- Yoruba - ERI
- Dyula - Samantio (xx)
- Bambara - SITA (??) (xx)
- Songhai - TARKONDI

Mainly old French Africa (Pierre Bourgin)

- Peul - N'JASTAN
- Nossi - OUBOGOU (OUBOGOU)
- ~~Wolof~~ - Nde (xx)
- Bambara - SAMA
- Bete - LB
- Senle - TARKOUDA
- DIOLA - SAMA (xx)
- Touba - KOUH
- Toucouleur - GNIVA
- MANDINGUE - SAMON
- BAOULE - SUI or SUI-KOFFI (fr. L. a. cyclotis)
- Fon - ADJINAKON
- Ewe } - ABIBIGON
- ITINA }
- Cococoli - EOU
- DJERMA - NABERI, TIE BERI
- Soussou - Sili
- EWEBO - ZOK
- BATOUN - N'SUEN
- Peul (CATTENANS) - GNIOUA
- BASSA - NGOMBI
- ARABE - FIL
- SARA - KENJI
- BORNOUAN - KETAGUET
- BOUDOUA - AT-BOU
- KOTOKO - ARFOU
- OUBAIEN - TOUONE
- MASSA - PEKNE
- SANJO - N'DOLI
- BANDA - IT BALA
- BAYA - FORO
- ZANDE - GUIMBALA, IT'BARA
- BANGALA - N'DJOKO
- IT' BETI - N'DJOKO
- PATOUIN - N'ZOCK
- IT' BOKO - N'ZAO
- BALALI - N'ZAO
- LONAGO - N'ZAGOU
- ESCHIRA } - N'ZAO
- BAPOUNOU }
- ITSAGO - N'ZOGOU
- OKINDAI - N'ZOKOU