



ELEPHANT WHISPERS

A Second Chance...

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

African elephants are at their most awe-inspiring in the wild, where these gentle giants can roam freely, interact with each other and engage with their young.

At the same time, their great intelligence, fascinating behaviour, and emotions like grief and empathy touch us deeply, in helping us to relate, to identify, to feel, to heal, and to learn.

In an ideal world, there is no question that the African Elephant belongs in the wild.

However, the world that we live in is less than ideal – necessitating expanded thinking and pro-active elephant conservation. Humans have caused enormous problems for elephants, and so must be actively involved in sustainable solutions.

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF VERY COMPLEX ISSUES AT PLAY, INCLUDING:

- Africa's rapid decline in suitable land for elephants to live on;
- competition between elephants and human populations for land and food; and
- over-grazing, nutritional stress, hunger and increasing conflict between man and elephants.

By way of example, many impoverished subsistence farmers lose their livelihoods to hungry elephants, yielding outcomes that are dangerous for the farmers and often fatal for the elephants.

These are the very real issues that altered the lives of the elephants at Elephant Whispers.

TEMBO, SHAMWARI, ZIZIPHUS, LINDIWE & ANDILE – A NEW JOURNEY

Tembo, Shamwari, Ziziphus, Lindiwe and Andile were five elephants in urgent need of relocation, or they faced being destroyed. The search for reserves where they could be relocated was unsuccessful, elephant numbers had placed many game parks under environmental stress.

Elephant Whispers made the commitment to provide a safe haven for the elephants to live for the rest of their natural lives. This gave birth to the idea of opening an education and tourism venue to secure the elephants' future.



THE NEW HOME FOR THE ELEPHANT WOULD REQUIRE:

- Hundreds of hectares for the elephant to roam freely, with free-feeding potential from natural vegetation.
- A reliable year-long food and water supply.
- Compliance with the stringent regulations of the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism and Mpumalanga Parks.
- Close proximity to expert veterinary care.
- Uniquely skilled and dedicated staff members.
- Sufficient visitor fees to generate the income to secure a stable future for the elephant.

Elephant Whispers believe that a broader conservation message can be entrenched and shared if people are inspired by the loving partnerships that are possible between humans and African Elephant. These twin quests led them to Hazyview, Mpumalanga.

FINDING A 'FOREVER HOME' FOR OUR FIVE AFRICAN ELEPHANT

After exploring the vast community-owned land of Sandford, the Elephant Whispers team knew they had found the right property. They leased the community property for 51 years and committed turnover-based monthly earnings to over 210 disadvantaged families. On 5 December 2007, the five elephant were introduced to their new home, where they were welcomed by a permanent complement of 48 passionate caregivers and support staff.

The team anticipated criticism – even accusations of exploitation for having rescued and homed the elephant – but knew, sincerely, that when the elephants' natural environment is not possible, feasible or safe, Elephant Whispers is the best second option.

Watching the elephant settle into their new home; enjoying a mud bath, swimming in their dam and spending time roaming the property together, Elephant Whispers feel certain they made the right choice for the elephant.



ELEPHANT WHISPERS SANDFORD, HAZYVIEW, MPUMALANGA

Opening their doors to the public in 2008 with a firm belief in the power of education to affect positive change for elephant, the team eagerly anticipated sharing their wealth of elephant knowledge with visitors.

Many of the guests are school groups, tourists seeking enlightenment, the terminally ill, disabled and those in need of healing.



Consider, if you will, a blind person who has never before seen an elephant. These visitors put their absolute trust in the Handlers and the elephant, experiencing a complete 'tactile tour' from the animal's smooth tusks and the patterned ridges under their feet, to the wiry hair on their body and tail. Placing their fingers on the pulse in the elephant's ears, blind guests can also feel the elephant's breath and inhale their distinctive smell. Through touch they come to know elephant; an extraordinary gift.



Each visitor to Elephant Whispers experiences a life-changing moment when they encounter the elephant, and the team work hard to translate this into an understanding of the need for long-term, sustainable wildlife conservation in general, and elephant conservation in particular.

Visitors to the Centre learn about the extraordinary behaviour and physiology of the African elephant, observing first-hand how the elephant have developed trust in the kindness and care they receive from the team. There are deep bonds and there is great harmony.

At the same time, they work closely with veterinarians, ecologists and scientists; conducting wildlife research projects; offering access to non-invasive training for domestic and international veterinary students; and providing learning experiences for game rangers and game trackers.

ELEPHANT CARE PHILOSOPHY

- Elephant Whispers respects the gentle nature of the elephant society.
- The bilateral 'ask-and-reward' principle is applied when working with elephant; a technique that is based on mutual respect.
- Methods that 'break the spirit' of any elephant are considered to be animal brutality at its very worst.
- The elephant will not be trained to conduct undignified or theatrical performances.
- The elephant are never chained and do not have their movement restricted.
- The elephant have time to roam freely, feed and interact with each other. As such, they spend set limited time with guests.
- Elephant Whispers will not breed with the elephant, to which end a six-monthly GNRH vaccine is administered to the male elephant.
- Elephant Whispers is committed to keeping the elephant in their care safe, healthy and content.



IN CONCLUSION

While Elephant Whispers cannot solve all of the challenges facing the African elephant as a species, they remain committed to what they believe is an effective way of reaching large numbers of people – particularly the youthful future leaders of African wildlife conservation.

Each day the team celebrate the privilege of sharing their lives with the elephant, and the contribution these five gentle giants are making for other elephant.



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