

Basis for Collaboration between ElephantVoices and Dancing Star Foundation

There is a unique place where the rights of individual animals, the conservation of species and the raising of global consciousness meet. It is at this rather unusual, often uncomfortable, and yet essential interface that the Dancing Star Foundation works. Through films, books, seminars, lectures and articles, the Foundation interweaves science and compassion to encourage the environmental stewardship and ecological ethics that the planet so desperately needs.

Working at that same intersection, ElephantVoices focuses on the earth's largest land mammal. Relying on decades-long research into the social, communicative and cognitive lives of elephants, husband and wife team, Joyce Poole and Petter Granli, use this foundation of knowledge to encourage a mind-shift in the way we view elephants and to promote policies for a kinder future for them.

The core outlook of both organizations is that the lives of individual animals matter, because what we do to them has consequences both for the well being of individuals, and for the complex social networks in which they live. The continued existence of a social species, like elephants, for example, is dependent upon healthy functioning of its societies and ecological communities. These populations and meta-populations are reliant, in turn, upon the endurance of friendships and the integrity of families and clans, all of which are dependent upon the well being of their individual members. Yet, how do we safeguard the integrity of these societies, prevent their over-exploitation and at the same time meet the needs of people?

All too often in the work of conservation, these individual building blocks of societies are forgotten, purposefully ignored and even disposed of, as organizations and nations barter away lives in the name of pure economics, "sustainable utilization," and buying goodwill from local communities. Robert Mugabe's 1997 rallying cry that wildlife must "pay to stay" is a sentiment that underlies a widespread attitude in which individual animals, societies and species have no business being here unless they prove themselves to be commercially useful. Yet, with this respect less attitude, what will happen as human populations continue to soar and wild animals and their habitats inevitably dwindle? When we are already beyond the point of being able meet the needs of humanity sustainably, how can we expect hungry people to nurture nature with access only to a "use or lose" philosophy? Surely, instilling understanding of the interdependence of life, and accountability and compassion for the needs, interests and lives of other beings, must also be incorporated in order to ensure the health of our planet, its web of species and our own very survival and well being. How much space are we willing to share or put aside for other species and their habitats? How much are we willing to forego to prevent the destruction of lives for our material use?

Elephants are large, long-lived and charismatic. Long-term studies show that they are socially complex and highly intelligent and that their life-histories parallel our own. As an enigmatic landscape species, in conflict with people for space and resources and vulnerable to commercial exploitation, elephants make perfect ambassadors in our effort to capture the world's attention and shape new attitudes toward animals.

The Dancing Star Foundation and ElephantVoices intend to [combine expertise, creative skills and networks in a targeted, multimedia effort](#) to instill respect for elephants, raise awareness of the issues they face, encourage environmental stewardship and ecological ethics and promote the incorporation of compassion into conservation and management practices. Through the plight of elephants we will work in concert to sensitize people throughout the world to the critical importance of biodiversity, animal protection and conservation.

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