



Elephants

“The elephant is the largest of all land animals. It remembers all the duties which it has been taught. It is sensible alike of the pleasures of love and glory, and to a degree that is rare among men even, possesses notions of honesty, prudence, and equity...” (Pliny the Elder, encyclopaedic *Historia Mundi Naturalis* c.AD77-79)

Species: *Elephas maximus* (Asian); *Loxodonta africana* (African)

- Highly intelligent creatures with cognitive skills similar to humans and those of apes, dolphins and some cetaceans
- They live in tight-knit families where the matriarch leads the group. They also form extended family groups and know each other very well. They communicate clearly through sound and touch. When they meet at watering holes and feeding places, they greet each other ‘affectionately’
- They show self awareness and empathy
- They communicate through infrasonic and seismic waves over long distances (sometimes over 10 km). They possess a sophisticated hearing
- They are believed to work intelligently with cognitive maps
- They are able to remember large scale spaces which allows them to trace water areas in times of droughts. They are also able to find the locations of over 15 family members in vast areas at one same time
- They possess a brain similar to humans’ brains in terms of structure and complexity...Their cerebrum temporal lobes are much larger than those of humans; these act as storage for memory. It is this fact which supports the theory of elephants’ big memories
- Their behaviour is learned through life (taught by adults, mainly the females)
- Believed ‘the world most emotionally human land mammal’ (D.S)
- ‘The Indian elephant is said sometimes to weep’ (C. Darwin)
- They have a lifespan of 60 to 70 years
- Elephants show concern for the members of their families. They take care of the weak and injured and they show grief over a dead relatives

- They have skin that is so sensitive they can feel a fly that lands on it (even though the skin is an average 2.5 cm long!)
- Female elephants undergo the longest pregnancy-22 months. Baby elephants are normally about 3 feet (1 m) tall and weigh about 200 pounds (91 kg)
- Elephants can suffer from sunburn so they throw sand on their backs and heads to protect themselves. They also do this to their young and often stand over them for protection while they sleep

To be continued...

See Bibliography & further research