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Encounters with the African Forest Elephant

Bob Golding

*This short story introduces the reader to the little known African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), two young females of which were kept in the Zoological Garden at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria in the 1960s and subsequently. The author had had no contact with, or even seen, a living forest elephant before this story begins and he 'discovered' the two females in the Zoo only after he had arrived there. At the time of writing (August 2019) it seems that a lone female in a Japanese zoo is probably the only representative of the African forest elephant in any zoo outside the African continent. The forest elephant, one of only three species of elephant on the planet, is increasingly threatened by human activities in the remaining tropical forests of Africa.*

One day, in October 1976, I found myself high in the skies above Africa's Sahara Desert. Nearly seven miles high in fact. Even from that height the particular patch of the earth's surface below me looked a little scary. It looked dry, remote and wild, with no sign of human activity. As I moved across it, the colours of the land varied, from rust red to golden brown with quite a few shades in between. Every now and then I could make out what seemed to



Young female African forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) at the University of Ibadan Zoo. 1964.

be areas with jagged shadows cast by rocky outcrops that might have been hills or mountain tops. I gazed down but recognised very little of what I could see, just an endless, distant, starkly beautiful landscape.

I was sitting in a very comfortable seat in a large jet airplane, the sort of airplane used to transport thousands of passengers around the planet every day, perhaps on business or for a faraway vacation. The aircraft was flying roughly north - south, having started its journey in London, and was now heading down to Lagos in Nigeria, West Africa. This flight was quite different, though, from any I had experienced before. For example, there was a complete absence of the sounds usually heard within a passenger aircraft - no squeals or shouts from bored or hungry children, no clattering crockery from rickety food trolleys, no sudden blasts from invisible loudspeakers, not a human voice to be heard. The members of the flight crew were in their cabin up in the nose of the aircraft somewhere, but I could neither see nor hear them. There was just the steady, subdued, background roar of the four jet engines.

In fact I was sitting, quite alone, within the bowels of a large cargo aircraft, surrounded by an assortment of large crates and smaller packages' With the exception of my own seat, there were no seats of any kind to be seen and most of the fittings and fixtures, such as overhead luggage racks and clusters of toilets, that take up room in a passenger aircraft were also missing. The result was a single, almost cavernous space, a flying warehouse, and I could see that the packages contained manufactured goods such as machinery, refrigerators, electric generators, television sets and Heaven knows what else. It was rather like sitting in an airborne British Home Store that had been plucked from some city trading estate.

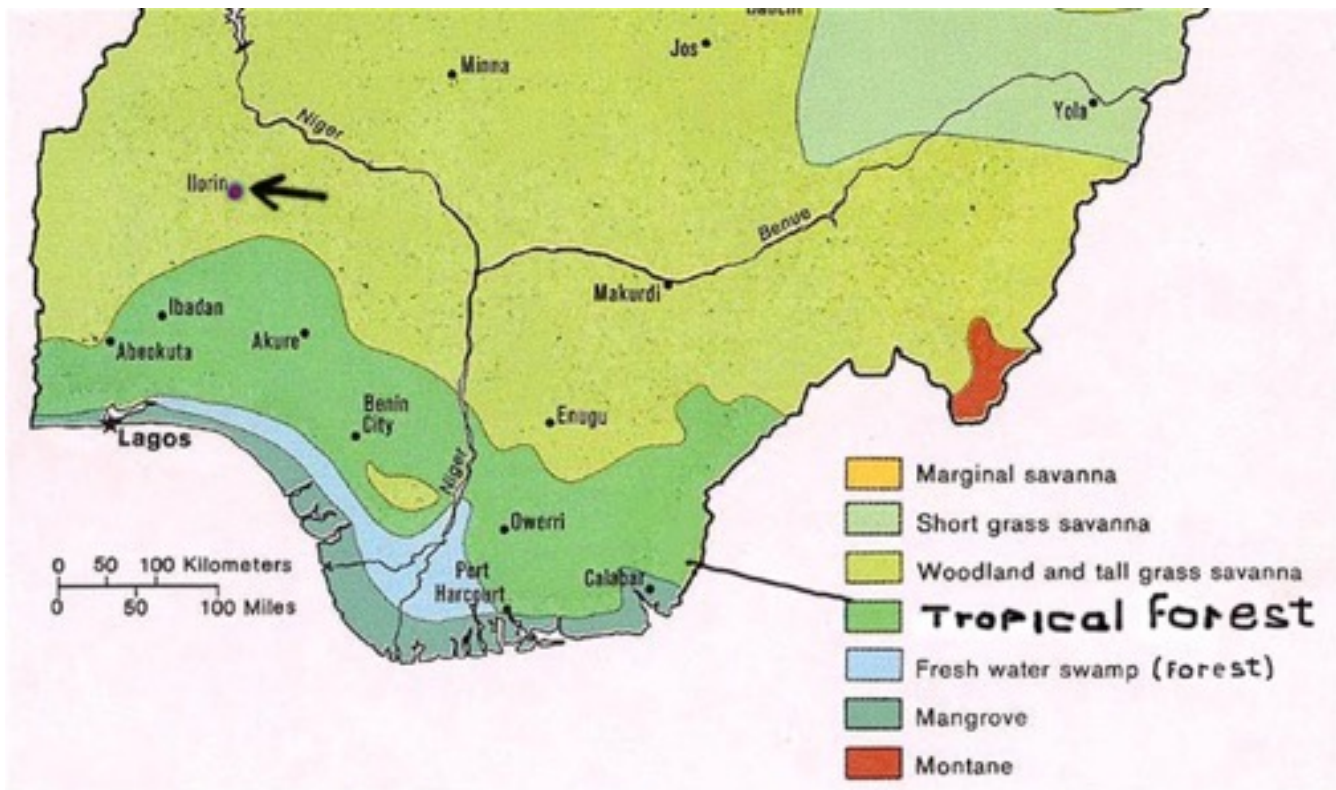
My solitary seat was positioned against the left side of the aircraft, next to a window; I had been told it was for my use only which seemed a superfluous comment as there was not another passenger in sight, not a soul to be seen. If, during a flight, you like to talk to your fellow passengers sometimes, or chat up the stewardesses - or stewards for that matter - this was clearly not the place to be.

Sadly, I wasn't enjoying the flight. Something was missing from the goods and merchandise stacked around me, something I had flown to London specifically to collect and take back with me to Nigeria, something I had decided, at the last minute and with a heavy heart, to leave with colleagues at Luton airport in London.

That something was a wooden crate containing a young African elephant.

The background to my lonely journey across the African skies had its rather complicated roots back at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and, specifically, in the University Zoological Garden where I was Curator. Before continuing this story I must take the reader back to some of the events that led to my being on an airplane with an absent elephant.

In 1963, just three years after Nigeria's independence, what was soon to develop into the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden was a small teaching and research collection of indigenous wild animals that had been acquired piecemeal by the University's Department of Zoology. This small 'zoo' included a few species of monkey, porcupines, hyraxes, birds such as owls and a solitary secretary bird and one or two non-venomous snakes, mostly



Showing the original tropical forest zone in southern Nigeria and its presumed northern limit (green / yellow interface on map). Most of the forest has now been felled. The two forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) at the University of Ibadan Zoo were taken when very young from two separate areas north of Ilorin.

housed in small, old fashioned cages. On a trial basis, the Nigerian public had recently been given supervised access to the area where the animals were being housed.

The University administrators were surprised at the level of interest shown in the animals and decided to advertise in the UK and elsewhere for a suitable person to develop the teaching collection into a full-time, educational zoological garden open to the public. At my home in Bristol I happened to see the ensuing advertisement in the London Daily Telegraph. I applied for the post, was invited to an interview in London, appointed and commenced work in Nigeria in September 1963.

During my term of office from 1963 to 1979, initially as Curator, the University administration decided to separate the Zoo from the Department of Zoology and redesignated it an independent Public Service Unit. As such the Zoo became responsible, under a newly appointed Director (yours truly), to a newly-established Zoo Management Board chaired by the Dean of the University's Faculty of Science.

In most cases the animals in the Zoo originated from wild specimens brought there randomly from somewhere in southern Nigeria by hunters and others. In some cases they had been transported from much further afield in Nigeria and occasionally from outside Nigeria. For example, our two young gorillas were transported - illegally - from Cameroon, and we imported pygmy hippos and one of the elephants in this story from the UK.

In 1965 the Zoological Garden attracted somewhere around 35,000 visitors annually. Public interest grew rapidly and the number of visitors increased each year. In 1970 the number



Left *Loxodonta africana* and right *Loxodonta cyclotis*. Both are young animals. Note that the lower external ear lobe or pinna of *L. africana* is more angular and extends further forward than that of *L. cyclotis* which has a generally smaller and more rounded pinna. The distance between the eye and the external auditory canal is proportionately greater in *L. cyclotis* which also has a longer and narrower mandible and a tendency to hold the head lower.

rose to to 158,000 and when I left my post in 1979 the figure was just under 250,000, more visitors than attended any other public attraction of any kind in Nigeria.

The increasing interest shown in the Zoo by the general public was largely due to it offering an opportunity for Nigerians to observe wild animals at close quarters, in most cases for the first time. The Zoo became a wildlife centre where visitors could also learn something about the wildlife of Nigeria and its conservation. It was visited by many school parties. The Zoo trained and developed a team of animal care staff, some of whom became outstandingly good zoo keepers and animal handlers by any standard. There were also maintenance workers, gardeners, a driver for our zoo vehicle, gate keepers, an accountant, a secretary and others.

As the title of this story suggests, two African forest elephants in the University of Ibadan Zoo are the main focus of this story, as well as some of the interesting and even sad events and developments that arose because of them. When I took up my post in Nigeria in 1963, a young, female, orphaned forest elephant named Dora was already resident in the Zoo. She had been acquired a year or so earlier as a very young animal from a location north of Ilorin (see map page 3). The elephant's mother had been killed by 'poachers' or 'hunters' although few details were available. However, the young animal was soon confiscated by wildlife officers and sent to the Zoo in Ibadan where she did very well. Soon after my arrival a second female forest elephant, later named Bodunrin by zoo staff, was brought to the Zoo, again by a wildlife officer, but this time from the Upper Ogun area, also north of Ilorin. The animal was only two or three weeks old on arrival. Her mother had also been killed by 'poachers' but, again, details were unclear. Despite some initial difficulties with its diet, this youngster was also successfully raised by zoo staff and volunteers. I should make it clear

that both young elephants were deposited in the University Zoo with the knowledge and approval of Nigerian government wildlife personnel.

Soon after arriving in Ibadan I began to gather more information on what was generally referred to as the forest elephant. It was described as being smaller in size than the grassland or savanna elephant (the species of African elephant usually exhibited by zoos and wildlife parks), of having a longer and narrower mandible, of holding its head at a lower angle, having straighter tusks that point downward, having a more rounded head in profile, more rounded external ears that cover a smaller area of the head, and having five well defined toe nails on each front foot and four on each back foot. ****This last feature now questionable**

When I saw our forest elephant, Dora, for the first time and, a little later, the newly arrived Bodunrin, I could see that each closely matched the description of the forest elephant set out above even though certain features could not be used for identification purposes at that time because the animals were very young. The differences in appearance between these two elephants and other African elephants I had observed or photographed elsewhere, and which almost certainly had come from a grassland area of Africa, were also clear to see.

The common name 'forest elephant' has, it seems, been used for some time in West and Central Africa to describe the elephant 'type' native to the tropical forests of that region. The name 'savanna elephant' has often been used for the 'type' found in the open grasslands, not only of Nigeria but of much of Africa. Both common names are still in regular use.

With regard to the classification and scientific name of the African forest elephant, I can only report on the most recent conclusions of taxonomists and other scientists. Forest and savanna elephants were at one time grouped together as a single species. Then they were declared to be two different sub species. More recently, further research concluded that the savanna elephant and the forest elephant had been separated for nearly three million years and are different species. The African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the African savanna elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) have been accepted as separate species since then. Together with the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) there are thus just three species of elephant on the planet.

It seems that the African forest elephant has been exhibited in zoos outside Africa only occasionally and that at the time of writing there may be just a single specimen in a Japanese zoo. A few have been kept in African zoos although those zoos may have been located within, or close to, the elephant's natural range and the elephants acquired casually.

As forest elephants, there was something very special about Dora and Bodunrin. I was intrigued and delighted to have them in the Zoo and to be able to provide a good standard of care, including veterinary care, and in particular the opportunity for our zoo visitors to observe an elephant at close quarters.



Photograph of a molar tooth of an African elephant, almost certainly *L. africana*.

Drawing of the lower jaw bone of an African elephant showing two molar teeth, one on each side.



So what is the future of the wild forest elephant in Nigeria? Most of southern Nigeria was once covered with tropical forest. According to the UN, Nigeria lost nearly 80 per cent of its old-growth forests between 1990 and 2005, the highest deforestation rate of natural forest on the planet during that period. The Nigeria Conservation Foundation has stated that the forest was cut down at world record rates between the early 1920s and 2006 when action began to stop its obliteration; the Foundation attributed the rapid rate of felling to high human population growth rates, conversion for subsistence and industrial agriculture, and logging. In the 1960s small areas of forest still remained in southern Nigeria, but felling continued at a rapid rate. In 2019 it is possible that small numbers of forest elephants remain in Nigeria although not necessarily in areas of forest. Reliable information is difficult to come by.

The capture locations in Nigeria of the two young forest elephants at the University Zoo, as well as the circumstances of capture were, I suggest, not entirely surprising. Much of southern Nigeria had, by the time of their capture, been cleared of forest; the remaining forest continued to be felled rapidly and a diminishing population of forest elephants may have been moving slowly northward into the savanna zone while continuing to be pursued and killed by 'hunters'. One can only conjecture...

With regard to the future of the wild African forest elephant, a research project carried out a few years ago highlighted a further concern. A report states that not only is it more than 20 years before the females can reproduce but that they give birth only once every five to six years. This reproduction rate means that population growth is around three times slower than that of the savanna elephant.

I remember that many of the people working in Nigeria who were in some way involved with the country's natural resources were pessimistic about the future of the forest elephant in



Dora being given a drink by the Zoo's head keeper Daniel Osula. 1964.

that country. During the mid 1970s it was suggested by a small group of interested parties that the University of Ibadan Zoo should explore the possibility of establishing a forest elephant breeding centre somewhere in southern Nigeria, preferably within easy reach of Ibadan, the University and the Zoo. It was thought that such a centre would have strong links to the Zoo and perhaps become a centre for elephant research in addition to participating in the captive breeding and conservation of these animals. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure sufficient financial support for this idea although it attracted much interest from those involved with wildlife conservation in Nigeria.

I have to say that, like everyone else involved, I was disappointed that these discussions came to an end without anything practical having been achieved. The establishment and management of a breeding centre for the African forest elephant in Nigeria would have been a natural extension of the Zoo's existing activities. Modern, well managed zoos seek to fill a number of related roles. These include the presentation of wild animals to the general public using techniques that inform and educate, the captive breeding and provision of holding facilities for species endangered or threatened in the wild, the establishment of a hub from which scientists could, for example, research the reasons for a species' decline in the wild, and participation in efforts to reduce or control that decline including wild habitat conservation. The Zoological Society of London at London Zoo and Bristol, Clifton and West of England Zoological Society Ltd at Bristol Zoo Gardens are examples of zoos that attempt to fill these roles and more.

Over the next few years both our young forest elephants, Dora and Bodunrin, continued to thrive. Although there were initial problems with obtaining the food products necessary to



Forest elephants Bodunrin left, Dora right. The University of Ibadan's Zoological Garden grew rapidly as a visitor attraction and a sanctuary where the public could observe wild animals in safety. By the time I left there in 1979, the Zoo was attracting nearly a quarter of a million visitors each year, more than any other public attraction in Nigeria. 1964.

ensure that Bodunrin's liquid food mix was properly balanced and acceptable to the animal, the situation eventually stabilised and a healthy young elephant emerged. We were fortunate in having access throughout the year to sufficient quantities of suitable, freshly gathered branches and green leaves, grasses, freshly harvested fruits, etc.

Both elephants were fit, active and inquisitive animals and they developed very close relationships with their keepers. Zoo visitors were absolutely fascinated by them and gathered around to watch whenever a zoo keeper spent time with one or both animals in their enclosure.

By the early 1970s it was clear that the rather basic elephant accommodation in the Zoo would soon need to be improved and updated. It had been constructed before I commenced working there. We would soon require purpose designed accommodation that would enable the elephants to be separated from each other and from the keepers when necessary and provide a secure holding area where a sick elephant could be isolated and treated.



With the cost of the project in mind, I began to sound out some of the University's administrators with a view to putting together a costed proposal for improved elephant accommodation.

It was at that time, in 1973, that the first small pointer to what turned out to be a disaster waiting to engulf us emerged in the form of what seemed a minor problem with one of the elephants. Whenever I think back to the occasion, my memory flashes up a particular slogan often seen painted in large letters on the front of some of the lorries or mammy-wagons that careered

During an elephant's lifetime the several (usually six) sets of molar teeth grow forward from the back of the jaw (from right to left above). As the new tooth moves forward, what remains of the tooth in front is finally pushed out.

around the streets loaded with passengers, bags of cement, bundles of freshly harvested plantain or whatever. The slogan warned that 'NO CONDITION IS PERMANENT' which, being loosely translated, means 'You never know what's around the corner'.

One morning the elephant keepers reported that Dora was having a problem of some sort with one of her small tusks. The tusk was obviously causing her discomfort and she did her best to prevent it from coming into contact with anything solid or hard, even when feeding. The Zoo had an ongoing arrangement with the University's Department of Veterinary Medicine for the provision of its first rate veterinary services. I called them, described the problem and a vet soon appeared. However, after just one attempt to examine her suspect tusk, Dora could not be persuaded to allow the vet anywhere near her again and she very determinedly kept him at trunk's length until he had no choice but to leave.



The elephant enclosure where Dora died. Note the enormous stand of bamboo that provided valuable shade (central dark area).

After another day during which Dora showed no sign of improvement, it was agreed that she should be examined as soon as possible while under general anaesthetic and arrangements were made for this to be done the following day.

Early next morning, with the Zoo closed to visitors, the elephant keepers and some other zoo staff gathered around the elephant enclosure and looked on as one of the two vets present injected Dora with an anaesthetic. During the next several minutes Dora grew gradually less

steady on her feet and a few of us followed her around, pushing hard against her when necessary to try to prevent her from falling over prematurely and possibly injuring herself. Finally, Dora's legs began to buckle and she sank, relatively gently, to the ground. Zoo keepers then rolled her on to her side with the suspect tusk on the upper side and easily accessible. Pretty well perfect so far!

The vets soon started their examination of Dora's tusk and the tissues around its base; they leaned over her as they worked away, occasionally stopping for a brief conversation or to pace around the small, prostrate elephant as though trying to get a better angle on things.



Dora's death - the photo above was taken after the post mortem examination and while the butchers were dismembering the carcass on the left. The Zoo was closed that day.

Everything seemed to be going well as the vets quietly got on with the job. A huge clump of tropical bamboo nearby provided valuable shade and responded to the occasional light breeze by gently rustling its long green leaves at us as though whispering quiet encouragement.

Then... Disaster! In what seemed was the mere twinkling of an eye, our world crashed around us.

Dora, our forest elephant, died! She simply stopped breathing and lay dead on the ground before us! I could hardly believe what had happened and I remember staring at the dead body for a long time in disbelief. The zoo staff present looked shocked and upset as indeed did the vets.

After a few minutes' discussion during which we all tried to recover our composure, it was agreed that the vets should carry out an immediate post mortem examination of the body to try to determine the cause of death. As the examination progressed, the dead elephant's stomach and intestines spilled out onto the ground, a quite astonishing sight that only compounded the unhappiness that had descended on us all that day.

The cause of death, however, was never clearly established. During their examination of the dead elephant the vets found no obvious problem. They assured me that everything had gone to plan up to the time of death and that all appropriate procedures had been followed. It was suggested that the elephant was perhaps allergic to the anaesthetic or one of the other materials or items used by the vets just prior to her death. Blood and other tissue samples were taken for further examination, but I was told later that they had provided no further useful information.



It was by then late morning and I needed to decide quickly what to do with Dora's corpse and piles of internal organs, including the enormous intestine. I certainly wanted all the body parts removed from the Zoo without delay, before it started to decay, which wouldn't be long at those high tropical temperatures. As a matter of urgency, and with the help of a colleague at the University, I set about trying to locate some remote part the University campus where Dora's remains could be buried. Fortunately, I was able to do this very quickly.

One of the results of the post mortem examination of Dora was a rare opportunity to view the exposed stomach and intestines. A function of the large stomach is to provide storage for the vegetation consumed. The intestines of a male African elephant can be as long as 19 metres and the products of digestion are absorbed through the thin walls of the caecum which is supplied with many blood vessels.

But how were we to cut Dora's corpse into smaller pieces, in particular without damaging the skeleton which colleagues were already planning to prepare later for use by the Zoology

Department's anatomy students? Someone had the brilliant idea of trying to contact some of the professional butchers in town and employing them to do the butchering for us. My zoo driver and the head zoo keeper drove quickly to the main meat market in Ibadan town and soon returned with four butchers, each carrying a selection of wicked-looking knives. The men were astonished to see, at close quarters, what awaited them - a dead elephant, or 'erin' in the Yoruba language; quite a change from the hundreds of cows they slaughtered and butchered every week. Without hesitation, however, and using their huge knives, they began to cut the corpse into smaller pieces although guided by us so that damage to the skeleton was minimal. They did this remarkably quickly although at one point I was intrigued to observe that one of the butchers had cut Dora's trunk into two separate pieces and was sitting quietly on the ground, holding and gazing at them as though mesmerised. When they had completed the job, all the bits and pieces of Dora's remains were loaded onto a large, tractor-drawn trailer and taken away to the temporary burial site on the University campus.

While this clearing up work was taking place, I became aware yet again of the great sadness that had descended on the zoo staff who had witnessed events that day. I, too, was deeply dismayed by what had happened as, in addition to the obvious reason for this, Dora's death left us with a solitary female forest elephant, Bodunrin, and the implications of this were far-reaching. The thought of Bodunrin living on her own, possibly permanently, was something I found unacceptable. Elephants are social animals and usually live in complex family groups where they interact with other elephants throughout most of their lives.

Before the death of Dora I had for some time been attempting to acquire a young male forest elephant which, hopefully, I would have been able to place with Dora and Bodunrin to form a compatible, and potential, breeding, group. However, I had had no success with this whatever. After Dora's death it was clear that the emphasis now should be on providing Bodunrin with at least one companion elephant as soon as possible and that, in the circumstances, we should be prepared to accept a female African savanna elephant to fill that role.

It took well over two years to locate, and negotiate the purchase of, a suitable specimen using the services of a respected international zoo animal broker. In 1976 this animal, a young, female, African savanna elephant from southern Africa, became available and was soon ready for its journey to London and then to Nigeria. This animal was not the perfect answer to our needs but I considered that Bodunrin would benefit considerably from the companionship and hoped that the new animal would fit into the arrangement without difficulty.

I have been asked occasionally if, in importing elephants from a different part of Africa, there was a danger of them escaping from our Zoological Garden into the wild and being absorbed into Nigeria's wild elephant populations, thus perhaps introducing unwanted genes into those populations. A comparison was made with the deliberate release into the south Florida countryside of many Burmese pythons, ex-pets that had since bred and increased in numbers and become a significant problem in wild Florida.

Briefly, the answer is that the two situations are quite dissimilar. In the case of the exotic pythons released into the wild by their irresponsible owners, these snakes are able to disappear into the tall grasses, scrub and waterways of south Florida almost immediately they are released. They live subsequently as wild snakes and are difficult to find, capture

and remove from the wild habitat as well as having a very much faster reproduction rate than elephants. In the case of imported elephants in our Zoological Garden, there was simply no possibility whatever of such large and conspicuous animals casually 'escaping', or finding their way through trading estates, across busy roads, through areas of dense housing, etc., without being recaptured within a very short time. In any case, the nearest wild elephants were a hundred miles and more from Ibadan.

We began to make the rather complicated arrangements to fly our newly acquired savanna elephant from southern Africa to Nigeria. For a number of quite unavoidable reasons we first had to fly it to London so arranged for it to spend a few days with a very experienced and helpful zoo nearby. This would break the animal's journey and enable it to have a health check. I was to fly to London from Nigeria, collect the elephant, fly back to Lagos with it and accompany it by road to Ibadan.



During the UK school summer holidays, many children of the University's expatriate staff came to Nigeria to be with their parents - who were then quickly abandoned in favour of the elephants at the Zoo...

Thus one morning I found myself, as arranged, waiting at Luton Airport near London. The truck carrying the elephant in its wooden crate arrived from the collaborating zoo on time, an hour or so before the aircraft was due to take off for Lagos. The crate was offloaded onto the tarmac, very near the waiting aircraft. The young elephant seemed relaxed in its crate and took food and water. I was assured that, during its short stay at the zoo, it had been kept in a temporary enclosure and had been able to exercise regularly.

As those of us involved in this operation, including people from the collaborating zoo, stood around the crate talking, exchanging information, checking paperwork and waiting for a fork lift truck to lift the crate up to the aircraft's loading bay, the elephant suddenly dropped down inside the crate! It rested on its underside with its legs folded awkwardly beneath it on the straw bedding. It lay there for some minutes without moving. We tried in vain to coax it up. It finally tried to get up onto its feet but was unable to do so; it seemed unable to move its legs into a position to support it.

I considered the situation. Elephants mostly stand while sleeping although they may have different sleep patterns when very young. They also sleep while lying on their side, but usually for relatively short periods. In a prone position an adult elephant's body weight may crush and damage its internal organs if in that position for too long. It was quite impossible to be sure that, in dropping to the floor of its crate, the elephant was seeking to sleep or rest or was actually unwell. No veterinarians were available within the time left before take-off and in any case the zoo's vets had earlier declared the animal fit to travel. I remained concerned that the elephant seemed quite unable to get back on its feet; and I was mindful that, after the fairly recent death of Dora in Nigeria, it was important that I return to Ibadan with a healthy elephant.

I calculated that the flight from London to Lagos, time spent loading the elephant's crate onto a lorry and driving it up to Ibadan, would total at least ten hours and quite possibly more. I came to the conclusion that to consign the elephant, in its existing questionable state, to another ten hours in its crate, was a risk I should not take. I thus decided to fly back to Nigeria without the elephant!

Our helpful zoo colleagues accepted this decision and quickly agreed to take the elephant back to their zoo near London, get it out of its crate, assess the problem and do whatever was necessary for its recovery. I had to get back to Nigeria as soon as possible and as my



Bodunrin in April 1965, aged around 18 months; she was the younger of our two African forest elephants. I much regret that I was unable to find a male forest elephant in Nigeria or in some way put together a potential breeding group of these animals when I was in Nigeria.

cargo aircraft was by now ready for take-off I had just enough time to climb up into the aircraft and be shown to my solitary seat.

This, dear reader, is about where we came in, back at the beginning of this story when I was sitting in an airplane on the way back to Nigeria without the elephant. As I said then, I didn't enjoy that flight. I thought about the zoo staff and others who would be so disappointed not to have the new elephant. However, I had no doubt I had made the right decision in leaving the animal in London.

The plane landed at Lagos airport around the middle of the afternoon and, after going through the Immigration and Customs procedures, I found some of my zoo staff waiting for me outside the airport building as previously arranged. They had driven down the one hundred or so rather difficult miles from Ibadan and had with them a truck with which to transport the crated elephant back to Ibadan,

as well as food and water to sustain it during this final stage of its journey. I explained to them what had happened. They were, understandably, very disappointed. As I said to them, however, provided that the condition of the elephant I had left in London was not serious or permanent and that the animal was found to be basically healthy by the vets back in the UK, it might well be possible to fly the animal down to Nigeria quite soon. And so we all left Lagos airport and drove the bumpy journey back to Ibadan.

A few days later I received a message from the collaborating zoo near London to say that the elephant had been driven quickly back to the zoo and helped out of the crate. The animal did appear to be unwell and was examined immediately by the zoo's veterinarian. Blood samples were taken for examination but no specific problem had been identified so far. It

was possible, of course, that the elephant had simply been tired; the important point was that it had apparently recovered quickly and completely.

The happy ending to the elephant saga was that the animal broker who had arranged the purchase and importation of the elephant on our behalf was able to accompany it herself on a flight from London down to Nigeria a few months later. This time it travelled well, remained on its feet in its crate and arrived in Ibadan in good health. The new elephant was given the Yoruba name Aduke (Aah-doo-keh) by the zoo staff and soon settled down to sharing Bodunrin's accommodation. The two animals quickly developed a close relationship and gave every appearance of enjoying each other's company. They lived peacefully and healthily together until I left Nigeria in 1979. Despite the challenging circumstances of its arrival and the difficulties that had confronted us, I felt that matters had concluded reasonably well.

I have just about come to the end of this story about two African forest elephants, one of them (Dora) now long dead and probably Bodunrin too. The events I describe above took place in the 1960s and 1970s and I left my job as Director of the University of Ibadan Zoo in 1979. Because of the discussions I describe on page 7 above regarding the possibility of establishing a breeding centre for the African forest elephant in Nigeria, I have kept a long-distance ear to the ground in case the idea re-emerges for meaningful discussion. To the best of my knowledge, however, this has not happened.

I am not sure how many wild forest elephants are still to be found in Nigeria. Neither am I sure how much of the original tropical forest remains there. Some say little or none, others that there are a few small areas here and there in the south although these continue to diminish in size and number. When I was with Gerald Durrell in Cameroon, the country immediately to the east of Nigeria, we spent some time in primary rainforest including a couple of nights under mosquito nets in the middle of absolutely nowhere. My lasting memory is of walking through a vast forest with some of the tallest trees I had ever seen and with an almost continuous canopy of leaves high above. I recall how remote it seemed. There were varied and intermittent bird calls that seemed to bounce around from tree to tree, the occasional burst of staccato mini-croaks from tiny tree frogs hidden away nearby and the distinct, not unpleasant, smell that seems peculiar to a very warm, damp forest. It was impossible not to be aware that the forest was teeming with life.

Even as I update this story, however (October 2020), recent news is that a large area of primary forest in Cameroon is soon to be felled to make way for a vast palm oil plantation. There is also talk of felling being permitted in some of the forest inhabited by the Cross River gorilla. In these days of rapid communications worldwide, it seems that the destruction of forests by man continues apace around the globe, in Africa and elsewhere.

Despite what is happening now, and the impossibility of knowing what the future will bring for our planet and the natural world, I really do hope that, one day, Nigeria will be able to reinstate at least some of its tropical rainforest. In the meantime, and from far away, I hope too that a patch of forest still remains there somewhere, hidden away and undisturbed, where Nigeria's remaining forest elephants continue to thrive....

Bob Golding

The End

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Addendum to the above 'Encounters with the African Forest Elephant.'

In late August, 2019, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) made news regarding, among other things, its plans to put a stop to the practice of forcibly removing baby African elephants from their mothers and transporting them to zoos overseas, mainly in China. Often the mother is killed during the process of the removal of its calf. On the 27th of August, 2019, the London Telegraph published the following item:

“ Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

It will no longer be legal for wild baby elephants to be snatched from their families and exported to zoos around the world after Defra ministers persuaded the EU to vote for a ban.

African elephants in Zimbabwe and Botswana were previously allowed to be exported to “appropriate and acceptable” destinations. Under this definition, Zimbabwe has been capturing live baby African elephants in the wild and exporting them to zoos in China and elsewhere.

EU delegates spoke strongly against the ban last week at the Convention for International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) conference in Geneva, arguing it would hinder the genetic diversity of elephants in zoos.

However, after heated backroom talks with Defra ministers, the EU performed a spectacular U-Turn and voted for the new legislation.

Now, the trade in wild elephants will be heavily regulated and only allowed in "exceptional" circumstances, and each case will be brought before the CITES committee.

Notably, the United States opposed both the original and amended proposal.”

These developments are to be welcomed. It should be remembered that, for several years now, a number of responsible zoos in the UK and elsewhere have accepted that they are unable to provide their elephants with certain important needs. Some zoos have gradually, as circumstances permitted, 'pooled' their elephants in those zoos and safari parks able to provide better conditions and facilities for their animals. Consideration of this and related matters continues.

As far as the two young forest elephants in the University of Ibadan Zoo are concerned (see above article), they were sent to the Zoo as orphans by Government wildlife officials. We did the only thing possible and attempted to keep the animals alive and raise them within their country of origin. Earlier in this article I explained my reasons for the importation of the young savanna elephant to keep our (by then) single forest elephant company.

It must also be re-stated that the young elephants in Ibadan Zoo created considerable interest among zoo visitors of all ages who were able to observe them at close quarters, in most cases for the first time. They became a major attraction in the Zoo and provided

valuable opportunities for visitors to learn more about them and their country's wildlife generally. They were of considerable educational value at that time.

The Telegraph newspaper went on to report the capture and export of baby elephants in some African countries. While this trade is to be opposed absolutely, the number of elephants involved is extremely small compared with those lost for other reasons.

A few more items of related information may be of interest:

- Africa now has 352,271 savanna elephants left in 93 percent of the species' range.

- The Cites Census (see above), concluded that the African elephant population declined by 144,000 animals in just seven years.



This photograph of poached African elephant tusks, shocking though it is, provides the casual observer with a mere glimpse of the extent and nature of the horrendous slaughter of thousands of elephants in countries across the continent each year.

- The current annual loss of African elephants is estimated at 8 percent. That's about 27,000 elephants slaughtered year after year. Illegal trophy hunting and ivory poaching is the main reason for the decline in numbers of African elephants, often by people who sell elephant tusks on the Chinese market.
- Loss of wild habitat also accounts for the annual loss of significant numbers of elephants. As human numbers grew, people started settling in forests and that has also affected elephant populations.
- **NB - Forest elephants**, which are found in central and west Africa, were excluded from the census because they're nearly impossible to spot from the air. But a 2012 ground study indicates that these elephants, too, are highly threatened by poaching and habitat loss.