

# Elephant Behavior

By Charles Siebert

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<sup>1</sup> **Y**oung elephants are **raised** within a matriarchal<sup>1</sup> family, beginning with their mother and then including sisters, cousins, aunts, grandmothers, and friends. These **bonds** endure over a lifetime that can be as long as 70 years. Young elephants stay close to their mothers and **extended family** members—males until they are about 14, females for life. According to Daphne Sheldrick, founder and director of an elephant orphanage in Kenya for over 30 years, “Whenever we get a new baby here, the others will come around and lovingly put their trunks on its back to comfort it. They have such big hearts.”



- <sup>2</sup> A **complex** communication system helps the elephants stay connected. Elephants express emotions using their trunk, ears, head, and tail. When they need to communicate over longer distances, they use powerful low-frequency, rumbling calls<sup>2</sup> that can be heard by others more than a mile away.
- <sup>3</sup> After a death, family members show signs of **grief**. Field biologists such as Joyce Poole, who has studied Africa’s elephants for more than 35 years, describe elephants trying to lift the dead body and covering it with dirt and brush.<sup>3</sup> Poole once watched a female stand guard over her stillborn<sup>4</sup> baby for three days, her head, ears, and trunk hanging in grief. Elephants may revisit the bones of the **deceased** for months, even years, touching them with their trunks and creating paths to visit the carcass.<sup>5</sup>
- <sup>4</sup> “Elephants are very human animals,” says Sheldrick. “Their emotions are exactly the same as ours.” Studies show that elephant brains are very similar to those in humans in the way they **process** emotions. The elephant brain also has a large quantity of spindle cells, which are thought to be related to **empathy** and social awareness in humans. Elephants have even passed the mirror test of self-recognition, something only humans, and some great apes and dolphins, had been known to do.

<sup>1</sup> **matriarchal**: having a family or social group in which the females have the most influence and power

<sup>2</sup> **low-frequency, rumbling calls**: infrasound used by elephants to communicate over long distances; sounds that the human ear cannot hear

<sup>3</sup> **brush**: small bushes and trees covering an open area of land

<sup>4</sup> **stand guard over her stillborn**: stay with and watch a baby that is born dead

<sup>5</sup> **carcass**: the body of a dead animal

### A Main Ideas

Check (✓) each possible answer.

This reading is about how elephants . . .

- ☐ form relationships.
- ☐ differ if they are male or female.
- ☐ hunt for food.
- ☐ communicate.
- ☐ express feelings.
- ☐ protect themselves.
- ☐ are similar to people.

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### B Close Reading

Read each statement. Decide if it is **True** or **False** according to the reading. Check (✓) the appropriate box. If it is false, change it to make it true. Discuss your answers with a partner.

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Female elephants play the most important role in the family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Male elephants separate from their female relatives before they are 14.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Elephants communicate only by making sounds.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Elephants feel sad for a long time after another elephant dies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Elephants handle their feelings in some of the same ways people do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. If elephants look in a mirror, they do not know they are looking at themselves.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>