

African Forest Elephant

DOMAIN
Eukaryota

KINGDOM
Animalia

PHYLUM
Chordata

CLASS
Mammalia

ORDER
Proboscidea

FAMILY
Elephantidae

GENUS
Loxodonta

SPECIES
L. cyclotis

WHERE DO THEY HANG OUT?

The African forest elephant primarily dwells within dense rainforests, though they can also be found in the savanna. Their range occupies western and central Africa, with the largest population living in Gabon.



ELUSIVE GIANTS

African forest elephants can grow between 8 and 10 feet in height. They have large, rounded ears that, in addition to hearing, help them regulate their body temperature. Their straight tusks are slightly pink and point downwards, unlike their savanna cousins. Both males and females grow them, although males generally develop larger, heavier tusks. Like all elephants, the forest elephant sports a tremendously strong trunk that helps them drink, eat, communicate, and smell.



WHAT'S ON THE MENU?



The rainforests where African forest elephants live offer them access to a variety of fruits and seeds to eat, as well as leaves and bark from the trees surrounding them. However, you may also see them eating soil; this seemingly strange choice is actually how forest elephants introduce important minerals into their diet that their veggies cannot. They access mineral water by digging with their feet and trunks.



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Extinct
EX

Threatened
EW CR EN VU

Least Concern
NT LC

THE FOREST'S CARETAKERS

By spreading the seeds of fruits and fertilizing them with their dung, the forest elephant helps grow more trees that capture carbon dioxide (CO₂) via photosynthesis to cool the surrounding environment. As forest elephants travel through the woods, species like chimpanzees, forest buffalo, pangolins, and even humans use their trails like a natural highway. Forest elephants also tear up undergrowth on the forest floor and reduce competition between trees for resources.

MEET ME IN THE BAI

African forest elephants live in small family groups made up of mothers and their offspring, but they sometimes gather in larger groups at bais (forest clearings) to socialize with extended family and other elephants. Bais also give calves opportunities to interact with other calves. Young males leave their family groups around age 14 and often spend much of adulthood alone, though they continue to socialize and visit bais to find potential mates. Females remain connected through complex social networks throughout their lives.



THREATS TO THEIR SURVIVAL



Habitat loss



Climate Change



Poaching



5 FUN FACTS ABOUT FOREST ELEPHANTS

Did you know?

Despite their size, forest elephants are surprisingly good swimmers. Plus, their long trunks double as their own personal snorkels!

Forest elephants communicate with each other over long distances using infrasound. These low-frequency sounds create seismic waves that can travel an estimated 800 meters, or miles, under perfect conditions. And they can "hear" the infrasound with vibration-sensitive pads in their feet!

Forest elephants remember the locations of fruiting trees and mineral-rich clearings over enormous areas of rainforest.

Some describe the forest elephant's tusks as having a pinkish hue. In addition, baby forest elephants can have pink underbellies!

One forest elephant was recorded with tusks reaching 2410 millimeters - nearly 2.5 meters long!



Significant threats include:

- **Habitat loss and fragmentation** from logging, agriculture, and development;
- **ivory poaching**, particularly for their dense tusks;
- **human-elephant conflict** when elephants enter farms and damage crops;
- **infrastructure development**, which fragments forests and makes remote areas more accessible to people and poachers;
- and **climate change**, which may reduce the availability of the fruit forest elephants depend on.