

Elephants in Ethiopia: background information



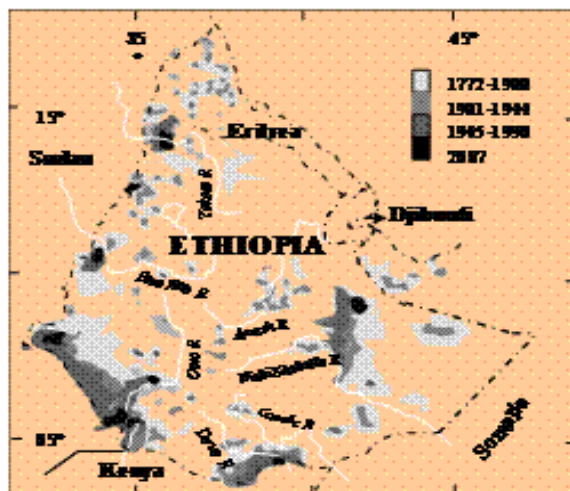
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Over the last 20 years, loss of habitat and poaching have reduced the population of several species of wild animal in Ethiopia, but the decline is most marked in larger mammals like the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*). Ethiopia has lost nearly 90% of its elephant populations since the 1980's, with the total number estimated at 1,200 in 2007.



Elephants are referred to as a "keystone" species as they play a pivotal role in the structure of plant and animal communities. Through tourism, elephants help economic development and also play an important role in local culture and religion.

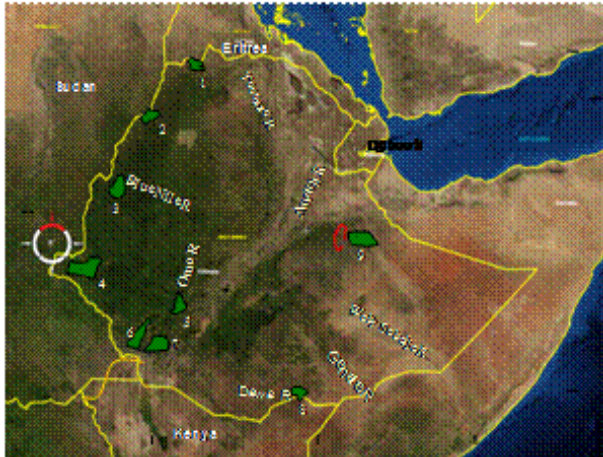
In Ethiopia, elephants live in a variety of habitats: from the semi-arid environment in Borana and parts of Babelle, Mago and Omo wildlife conservation areas to the tropical forest in Chebera-Churchura National Park.



In 1990's, elephants were found in 16 areas totaling 94,291 km². In 2006, fragmented herds of elephants were only found in 9 areas totaling 28,895 km². Three populations are found in the west, two in the south, two in the north and one in the east of the country. Around 93% of the total elephant range lies within designated protected areas, but these areas are also used by humans. The eastern population is found only

in the 6,982 km² Babilie Elephant Sanctuary (ES) that was designated by the late Emperor Haile Selassie in 1970.

As human settlements and agriculture have expanded into protected areas to take the most fertile land, elephants have been pushed further into marginal lands.



Legend: 1. Kafta-Shiraro NP, 2. Alatish NP, 3. Dabus CHA, 4. Gambella NP, 5. Chebera-Churchura NP, 6. Omo NP, 7. Mago NP, 8. Borana CHA, 9. Babilie ES

The Babilie ES supports the last population of elephants in the semi-arid environment of the Somali-Maasai Biome type. The current population of Babilie elephants is 324. The Sanctuary is vital for the survival of this population and has become a model site for elephant conservation and research in Ethiopia. Research-based conservation projects supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and the Wildlife Conservation Society from 2003 to 2007 showed that there are two distinct elephant subpopulations. The smaller Erer Group occupies the Erer Valley and the larger Gobele Group with its own home range in Gobele Valley overlaps with the Erer Group in the rainy season.



Despite establishing the existing conservation areas, elephant conservation programs in Ethiopia have not been successful due to lack of Government resources, commitment and law enforcement. The environmental threats to Babilie typify those affecting other conservation areas; increasing human population, the associated unsustainable utilization of natural resources for agriculture and household materials, and the illegal hunting of elephants for ivory.

Elephants have been displaced from most of their previous ranges in east Ethiopia due to an increasing

number of pastoralists that have shifted their lifestyle to farming. Coupled with the encroachment of livestock into this protected area, elephants are displaced from most of their former ranges. The ever-expanding farmland monopolizes essential resources such as green vegetation areas and water resources. Human settlement and land taken for crop cultivation has blocked elephants' migratory routes and access to water. There is an urgent need to find ways that human and elephants can coexist.

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