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# BOOK REVIEW

## STUDYING ELEPHANTS

Edited by Kadzo Kangwana

AWE Technical Handbook Series (7), African Wildlife Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya. 1996.

Reviewed by Ruth Chunge

During the past few years there has been a spate of published "elephant" books on both African and Asian species. Many are beautifully illustrated with colour photographs and drawings; several tell a story. Some contain useful and detailed information on the biology of elephants, the history of elephants in relation to man, or the conservation and management of elephants. None, however, describes adequately all the techniques for studying elephants in the field.

*Studying Elephants*, published in English and French (with a Portuguese version in preparation), does just that. It contains a wealth of information on techniques for studying African elephants (much of which can also be applied to the study of Asian elephants). The information is presented in a systematic, straightforward style, with simple, yet effective, black-and-white illustrations throughout. While it is not a glossy "coffee-table" book, neither is it a heavy-going academic book fit only for the book shelves of professors. As the name of the AWF series suggests, it is a "technical handbook" which is aimed at research students and staff, and protected area staff. It also has the potential for much wider application - to biology students in general, wildlife department staff and a range of conservation workers wanting to refresh their existing knowledge or simply to give themselves a solid background knowledge of elephants and techniques for application to their work in the field or in the office.

The book is well organised by subject. It begins with a general chapter about African elephant biology,

which is followed by 17 more chapters, split into six sections, namely: Elephant Management, Counting Elephants, Studying Populations, Developing Research Techniques, Elephants in their Human Context, and Handling Elephants. All the sections are valuable, but the chapters in Counting Elephants and Studying Populations are particularly useful for the collection of accurate, baseline data on elephant populations, while the topics covered in the other sections are more valuable for specialised projects.

Each chapter is written by an expert of the subject being addressed and together, the authors' names present an impressive list. None of the chapters is intended to be an exhaustive guide, but each ends with a reference list of source literature enabling a reader to study the subject in more detail if necessary. Several chapters include "boxes" with additional, more detailed information which complements the main text.

*Studying Elephants* will prove invaluable to those about to embark on a study of elephants or who want to improve their general knowledge on a wide array of elephant-related techniques. It will be found frequently in the back-packs of research students and field staff and will, no doubt, be often listed as a reference on theses and published research articles. Perhaps one day, even more appropriately, it will be published in hard-back form as a handy "pocket guide", preferably with its striking cover photograph still in place.