ELEPHANT ECHOES

Updates from the International Elephant Foundation (IEF)

INTERNATIONAL ELEPHANT FOUNDATION.ORG

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The International Elephant Foundation is the catalyst for creating a sustainable future where elephants thrive by linking people and elephants for their mutual long-term benefit.

Founded in 1998, IEF is a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation of individuals and institutions dedicated to the conservation of African and Asian elephants worldwide. IEF creates a sustainable future for elephants by generating and effectively investing resources to support elephant conservation, education, research, and management programs worldwide. Through our passion, expertise, knowledge, and partnerships, we inspire and engage people to ensure a vibrant future with elephants everywhere.

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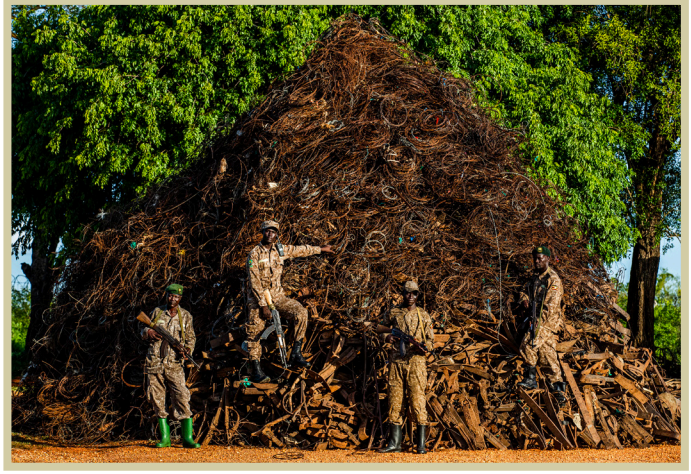
What Lies within 'Snare Mountain'



Renowned photojournalist Paul Hilton releases exclusive photos of ominous 'Snare Mountain' from Murchison Falls National Park, Uganda.

Some of this world's real-life wildlife warriors are the brave individuals from the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) who risk injury and death to lead the charge to reclaim Murchison Falls National Park from poachers. Working with the Uganda Conservation Foundation (UCF) with support from the International Elephant Foundation (IEF), rangers are taking on this massive security task after decades of war and security threats from terrorist organizations like the Lord's Resistance Army. In 2022, anti-poaching patrols confiscated over 12 tons of wire snares and leg-hold traps that are responsible for decimating Murchison Falls National Park's wildlife populations and shown in the photos dubbed 'Snare Mountain' by renowned photojournalist Paul Hilton. Collected last year as part of the Murchison Falls Recovery Programme, this massive pile represents both the significant challenge facing wildlife rangers and the ability of these warriors to tackle the task.

UWA rangers collect a Snare Mountain's worth of these devices every year, and yet there are still more unfound, and thousands of animals are maimed and killed annually. Initially a hunting strategy used by subsistence communities, the numbers of leg-hold traps found and the cost per trap indicates that powerful networks of poachers and illegal wildlife crime syndicates are now involved. UWA Ranger Corporal Patrick Owachgiu reports that the amount of leg-hold traps and wire snares collected is far greater than the Snare Mountain images showcase. In fact, UWA has collected approximately 47 metric tons of snares, traps and poaching weapons since the start of the project in 2012.

Photographer Paul Hilton created Snare Mountain to illustrate the challenges facing wildlife, habitats, and those who seek to protect them. Snares are indiscriminate killers, crushing the legs of lions and giraffe, amputating trunks and legs of elephants, and even injuring rangers. Snare Mountain represents a significant challenge but not an unsurmountable one. Over the past 10 years IEF has supported the construction of 15 ranger stations, land and marine, a veterinary facility, and the Joint Operations Command Center (JOCC) which coordinates all of Murchison's ranger and security operations. Recovered snares are used in the construction to fortify the foundations of the ranger posts, eliminating the possibility they can ever be used again. The good news is that where ranger stations have been established, wildlife is recovering.

"We inherited Murchison Falls National Park from decades of war and the Lord's Resistance Army terror," said Sam Mwandha, Executive Director Uganda Wildlife Authority. UCF and their supporters "have helped us recover the park, wildlife populations and tourism. The highly endangered Rothschild giraffes are up from 400 to 2000, and we have 80 percent of the world's population! Lions and elephants are also increasing nicely. Thanks to our wonderful partners supporting what we actually need, we can continue protecting the Park for future generations to enjoy."

"Paul's images show the brutal determination of the Uganda Wildlife Authority rangers and our own supporting teams," said Michael Keigwin MBE, Founder of the UCF. "Every snare and trap will have killed before, and now can't again. The Rangers have generated one of the greatest recoveries of any national park in Africa, a renaissance that can spread with greater support."

These security efforts are helping Uganda return to its pre-war glory of being one of the very best places for wildlife tourism in all of Africa. This also contributes to strengthening Uganda's economy. A growing economy means less poverty which means less reliance on illegal wildlife crime for subsistence communities which have been even further devastated economically by the recent COVID pandemic.

Charles Tumwesigye, Director Field Operations for UWA noted that "through the COVID period, when the River Nile flooded community farms and fisheries, the Recovery of Murchison Falls Programme, with its partners (Tusk Trust, International Elephant Foundation, Global Conservation, David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, Great Plains Foundation and the Dulverton Trust) stood by UWA, fueling and maintaining patrol and logistics cars and boats, providing monthly food for Rangers across Murchison Falls National Park, as well paying for critical veterinary drugs, equipping rangers with boots, rain coats and rucksacks, and employing youth from communities and families struggling with lock downs and flooded land, that were likely to start poaching." Responsibility for spotting, safely removing, and destroying snares is directed by the UWA rangers with help from 20 permanent scouts supported by UCF and IEF.

The Scout Program was developed by UCF to stop the cycle of poaching within families. The elders of households who were known to be involved in poaching were approached. UCF recognized that the elders themselves were unlikely to stop poaching because they were firmly entrenched in that lifestyle and have little else to do, but they were likely to reduce or stop poaching completely if a young family member was helped in exchange. One hundred households agreed to this proposal and 100 youths were accepted into the UCF youth development program. They were sponsored to attend the local community college and at graduation were provided training which led to employment as apprentices. Through this mentoring program, young people who were potentially headed for a life of crime and poverty have learned how to behave professionally, developed skills and become highly employable with multiple career choices. Twenty graduates of the program were recruited and applied to the Scout Program. These twenty young people want to eventually become rangers because they have come to know various rangers, respect the work that they do, and have an appreciation for wildlife.

The Scouts receive training by UWA rangers. They are unarmed and do not have the power to arrest as they are just starting their conservation training. They work in the Delta area of Murchison Falls carrying out low risk but high volume work such as snare removal. With ranger deployment being at a very low level in the area in terms of manpower, the effect the Scouts have made has been dramatic. The Scouts are greatly respected by the Warden in charge of law-enforcement and the Chief Warden. Scouts provide them with the manpower that they otherwise would not have and it reduces the number of animals injured, maimed or killed. They also save UWA veterinary service resources by reducing the number of veterinary rescue responses to animals involved with snares.

The support of international NGO's like the International Elephant Foundation is what makes the difference between maintaining the conservation gains of the past decade and backsliding resulting in losing control and countless animals and habitat. Snare Mountain is a striking image that holds so much more than an incredible amount of traps and snares; it holds Uganda's past and signals her future where wildlife and people thrive together.

Snares in Asia

The devastation from snares and traps is not exclusive to Africa. Anywhere there is wildlife there is wildlife crime, and that crime is (in part) conducted via snares. We asked some of our projects in Asia to discuss the relationship their habitats have with snaring. Here's what they said:

"While it is illegal to set out snares in national parks and other protected areas in Sri Lanka, the use of snares in some other areas is not regulated. Local communities living around wildlife may use snares to protect their crops from wildlife or to catch some species (especially wild boar, in Sri Lanka) for sale and/or consumption. Unfortunately, snares affect wildlife indiscriminately, and so other unintended animals often are harmed in the process. Elephants may get their trunks caught in snares as they go about their daily lives foraging and finding food, and as an elephant struggles to get loose of the snare, they are often left with permanent scars of their experience (or even worse, their trunk may be shortened). While wild elephants are adaptable and can often cope with injuries, it can be particularly devastating for an elephant to lose such a vital part of their anatomy. Trunks are used for feeding, drinking, dusting, socializing, finding mates, and locating potential threats, and so any damage can have widespread impacts. For example, an elephant has specialized sensory receptors at the end of its trunk, and so even losing just the tip of the trunk can negatively impact an elephant's ability to navigate its complex social and physical environment. Even if an elephant is not snared on its trunk, any exposed tissue resulting from a snare wound can potentially become infected, having systemic consequences that can be fatal. Sustainable solutions that allow human communities to persist around elephants and other wildlife without the use of snares are needed, including for the wellbeing of animals."

-Chase LaDue, IEF Advisor and Postdoctoral Fellow in Animal Behavior at Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden

Elephant affected by snares in Wasgamuwa National Park, Sri Lanka

Meanwhile, in Cambodia…

"Along with deforestation, snares are the single most damaging issue facing the survival of Cambodian wildlife.

Snares are cruel and indiscriminate in their killing, trapping endangered and common species alike. These "Walls of Death" are set up in large numbers in the forest and often go unchecked, leaving animals to die a slow and painful death from infection, starvation, and thirst. The high number of snares set means that they will ultimately wipe out all the wildlife in the area – if an animal does not become caught in one snare it will fall victim to another. Snares are placed strategically, such as around water points or at the entrances of grasslands, and are very efficient. Made from cheap materials, such as basic rope, metal wire, and other inexpensive materials means that they are widely available and require very little investment for what can generate large sums of money - motivated purely by financial profit, the more snares set, the more gain for the hunters.

Most conservation NGOs conducting surveys using camera traps have photographs of animals that have been caught in snares, several of these are of elephant calves. Wildlife Alliance assisted with the rescue of an elephant calf in Mondulkiri province, who had been snared. The elephant that survived lost his foot and is now at Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Centre and must wear a prosthesis for the rest of his life. His name is Chhouk and is an ambassador for Cambodian wildlife and the unimaginable suffering snares pose.

Two sun bears that were rescued by Wildlife Alliance, rehabilitated, and then released in Koh Kong province (home to the majority of Wildlife Alliance's projects including forest protection) survived perfectly in the forest for around three months, despite the fact that they had been in captivity from a very early age. They ultimately also fell victim to snares and were recaptured having broken free of the snares. One subsequently died.

A young, snared black bear that Wildlife Alliance rescued in Kirirom National Park in 2004, which was taken to Phnom Tamao Wildlife Rescue Center for care, lost its foot to infection just five days later, despite being in the snare for only a few hours.

These are but a handful of the many examples of the problems that snares cause that we know about. The ones we do not know about – and there are countless - will be uncountable and our hearts are always heavy as a result.

Wildlife Alliance has been working tirelessly since 2002 in the Southern Cardamom Landscape, which is one of the last remaining elephant corridors in southeast Asia. Our forest protection program has confiscated 369,685 snares and 103,030 meters of nets and other snaring materials to date (as of April 2023). Despite these large numbers, it is a drop in the bucket and so much more remains to be done. The continued use of snares, combined with weak and poorly drafted laws that do not directly outlaw snares, speaks not only to a lack of understanding of the magnitude of the problem but the immense scale of threats posed to wildlife and the challenges to crack down on what can only be described as a pure evil."

-Amy Van Nice, Wildlife Alliance, 2022 IEF Conservation Grant Recipient

These are just two of the many stories about wildlife being impacted by snares. Whether it is giraffe and lions in Africa or tigers, tapir, and sun bear in Asia, all wildlife is at risk to this ruthless, indiscriminate killer.

Three Oregon Students On the Road to Being Conservationists

Getting youth involved in conservation can make a jumbo positive impact. When friends and neighbors Mackenzie, Alexa and Ember learned about the challenges facing elephants around the world, they decided to work together to help.

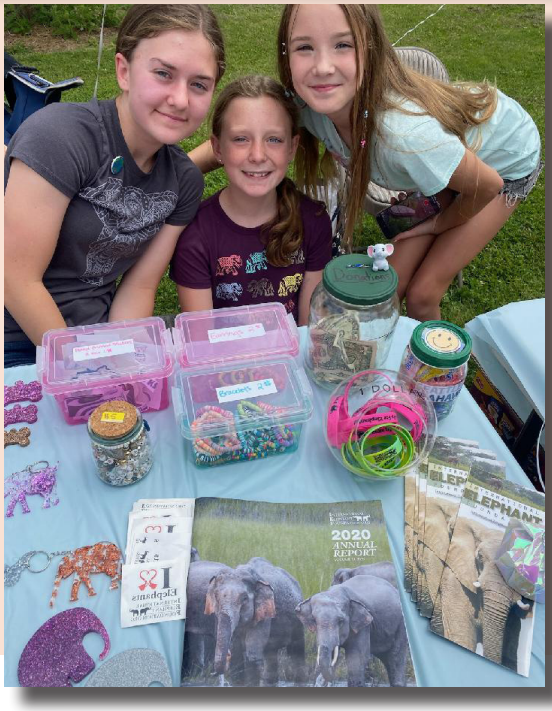
Sisters 13-year-old Mackenzie and 11-year-old Alexa joined with friend 10-year-old Ember to hold a fundraiser for elephant conservation at a local park supporting the work of the International Elephant Foundation. They sold lemonade, bracelets, popsicles, and even had a raffle, sharing information about IEF and elephants with everyone who stopped by. "The people in our community were supportive of our event by spreading the news, donating, and just all together being supportive," said Mackenzie of their local Oregon community reaction to their event. The community and their families were definitely supportive as the girls raised over $1000 in just a few hours over one weekend.

Inspiration to act came from a lifelong passion for elephants. Mackenzie shares that "Whenever we go to zoos or the Wildlife Safari, going to visit the elephants is by far my favorite part! They are such beautiful animals and are really cool to see even if they're just eating. One time at the zoo I got to see an elephant swim in water and do tricks which was SO cool." This passion inspired by elephant ambassadors is shared by Alexa, who recalls her first experience seeing elephants as "big, beautiful, and majestic."

This mighty trio converted their wonder and admiration into action because as Ember says, "without elephants, ecosystems on earth would just crumble." She's right, as elephants are environmental engineers and umbrella species, helping to protect and maintain habitat health everywhere they live. Even though Ember has never seen an elephant in person, the passion and drive of Alexa and Mackenzie called her to action.

For a budding conservationist like Mackenzie, elephants are the perfect species to focus on. "I have always been really interested in saving the earth. When I am older I would like to take on a career as a marine biologist or some other earth saving career. Coming to the end of the school year I figured it would be the perfect time to pursue this passion. MY favorite animal is an elephant and it always has been, so I did a Google search for the best elephant charity and there you guys were. Then I told my best friend and sister who both loved the idea and were interested in helping save them."

Everyone can make a difference for elephants, as these 5th, 6th, and 8th graders can attest. Alexa said her favorite thing about elephants is "how they stick together as a family," much like these three students worked together as family. Their work gives an important reminder of how we all need to be good stewards of our animal families.



Board Member Spotlight
Michael Fouraker

Meet IEF's Founder and the man who got everything started for us, Michael Fouraker. In 1998, frustrated by the lack of funding available for elephant conservation and research efforts, Michael, Executive Director of the Fort Worth Zoo, envisioned an elephant foundation that would provide funds and expertise to worthy projects. As a board member of the very successful International Rhino Foundation (IRF), Michael believed that the organizational structure and business plan of IRF could be used as a template for multiple elephant holding facilities with diverse missions to come together for a shared common goal of contributing to the long-term preservation of elephants. So he invited nine representatives from zoos, circuses, private elephant facilities and a university to Fort Worth, Texas to discuss how a foundation could significantly enhance current conservation efforts. From this first organizational meeting the International Elephant Foundation was born. Michael has held many roles with IEF over the years, but is the current President of our Board of Directors. We are excited to share more of his story with you.

Tell us about the first time you met an elephant?

My first job as a teenager was in a popcorn stand at the Chilhowee Park and Zoo. That year's newest attraction was a pair of baby African elephants and I remember being intrigued by their behavior as well the large ears and the way they could manipulate their trunks.

How did you get started working with animals?

A position open at the zoo that allowed me to continue college classes part-time. Over the years, I had the great experience of working in a variety of departments and with multiple species of animals giving me a very broad foundation of animal management and zoo operations. The first and second African elephants born in North America were born at the Chilhowee Park and Zoo. In those days, there wasn't much known about elephant reproduction in zoos so it was very special to be a part of the early building blocks of the foundation of elephant management. Much of what I learned in my early career regarding other species especially the big cats and elephants was gleaned from circuses, friends and private animal facilities. There was and still is a wealth of untapped practical knowledge about animals in these arenas.

While you are the President of IEF's Board of Directors, you are also our founder. What inspired you to start IEF?

I watched hundreds of thousands of dollars being spent on meeting after meeting focusing on elephant conservation and no action as a result. There did not appear to be an understanding of how to turn the discussion into action. I knew if we could get the right people in the room and

develop a strong partnership based on the common goal to protect elephants in the wild, support critical research and encourage education programs at multiple levels we could make a difference.

You are the Executive Director of the Fort Worth Zoo. How do you think conservation and elephants in human care work together?

Elephants in our care give us opportunities to study the species in a way that is not possible by watching elephants in the wild. We are able to study health issues and diseases leading to the development of techniques and treatments that benefit not only those in human care but also those in the wild. A good example is the Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpesvirus or EEHV which is found in every elephant population worldwide. With our ability to collect samples from our elephants, and the funding support of IEF and other organizations and individuals we are on the cusp of having a vaccine that will counteract the deadly impact of EEHV. In addition, as I walk through our zoo on a daily basis, I am witness to the thousands of children and their parents who are captivated by the animals they see. I watch them read our signage, I overhear their conversations and have been told by countless people how a visit to the zoo has made a difference in their lives. One of the reasons we exist is to provide people who are unable to travel the opportunity to see, experience and appreciate the natural world .

You are very active with many conservation organizations having started multiple species foundations like IEF. You have also travelled extensively for conservation activities. Can you share a story or experiences from the field?

Early in my career I managed a collection of over 60 big cats - tigers and lions - and by default became a leader in the management husbandry of the Asian lion in human care. I have very fond memories of my experiences in India working with numerous colleagues studying big cats in the field. The comradeship, the friends I made for life, and the data we obtained negated the many hardships we endured on a daily basis. Later my attention turned to white rhino and our difficulty breeding them in human care. With so many similarities between the problems facing both rhino and elephants, my attention turned to how I could help elephants through creating IEF. One thing I have learned over the years when working in the field in other countries is that everything we do has an impact good or bad, and it may be years before the impact comes to light. We must be culturally sensitive, work with the impacted communities and governments and don't get discouraged. Change cannot be expected overnight, we are in it for the long haul.

Michael's pretty impressive, don't you think? He's a living example of what you can get done if you simply keep going and stay determined. IEF is more than lucky to have Michael Fouraker in our corner—we literally wouldn't exist without him.

Donor Spotlight: Tricia Berry

Sometimes the universe aligns and wonderful people come into your life and make a real difference; this is how IEF feels about ***Tricia Berry*** *and her husband Joe. These incredible individuals are committed conservationists who take their support personally. From connecting with project researchers at our 18th International Elephant Conservation & Research Symposium in South Africa to devouring reports and project updates, Tricia devotes time as well as money to making the world a better place for elephants.*

Tell us about yourself, Tricia.

I was born and raised in beach communities in Los Angeles and now live in San Diego with my husband Joe. We met when my L.A. public relations firm handled a marketing campaign he was doing for his San Diego-based company. I moved to San Diego to live with Joe, a New England transplant, 36 years ago. We now have two grown sons and two little grandkids. We have also lived with a varying number of dogs and cats over the years. Frequent trips to the San Diego Zoo and the Wild Animal Park were basic to our lives as the boys grew up. Concern and compassion for animals and the planet's natural world is part of our family bond.

We have donated to many environmental causes over the years, but never felt a personal connection to them nor did we have any idea how well our money was being spent. So we decided to have our family trust support only charities where we could be certain our dollars were being used wisely to support missions we felt passionate about. Being "effective altruists" is our goal for the Berry Family Trust.

How and when did you become interested in elephants?

First I started volunteering here in San Diego at animal shelters and fostering dogs and cats for a friend's dog rescue. My knowledge of the animal world expanded immensely when a volunteer at the San Diego Zoo convinced me to become one, too. I was trained to be an "interpretive volunteer" telling guests about animals in four areas at the San Diego Zoo's Safari Park: gorillas, cheetahs, a savannah with rhinos, giraffes, and others East African hoofed animals, and the African elephants. I loved all four groups, but I became enamored with the elephants. I started volunteering by doing each species' area weekly, but soon most of my time was spent with the elephants, introducing guests to the Safari Park's soon to be 11-member herd. I was lucky enough to see Zuli, a boy elephant, 45 minutes after his birth, when he was being introduced to his aunties and cousins. Watching their ecstatic greetings and caring strokes for the newest family member was emotional for everyone watching. Six weeks later a little girl calf, M'Khaya, was born from another of the mature females and she was a beloved little spitfire. For the next three years as a volunteer I became more and more amazed witnessing the elephants' ingenuity, unique personalities, family bonds, emotional natures, playfulness - and humor. Some would even play jokes on their keepers.

I decided with my husband that we should support wild elephants, especially since, as a keystone species, we could help other endangered wild animals if we focused on elephant conservation.

Why IEF?

I asked the zoo's coordinator for training volunteers if she could recommend any nonprofit helping save wild elephants in their home countries. Her only suggestion was the International Elephant Foundation. I called IEF's Executive Director, Deborah Olson, and she took the time to answer my many questions, teaching me so much more than I ever knew about the various plights of elephants that differed depending on the country and area they were in. Joe and I flew out to meet with her and learn more about the projects they support. We learned that IEF Administrators, Board and Advisors carefully peruse many grant proposals from specialists in elephant range countries looking to IEF for funding. IEF continues support for those with past success and are always eager to review unique and promising new ideas for elephant protection.

We were impressed by the expertise of their Board of Directors - all not only unpaid but also substantial financial supporters of IEF - and Advisors. A bonus was Deborah's assurance that we could actually select specific projects to support. Joe and I found it reassuring that each grantee must provide semi-annual reports that include progress towards goals as well as where the money they've received from IEF is being spent. Since the money goes directly to the NGO's and researchers in the elephant range countries where the projects take place, our money would go further in these areas than in more developed countries. We enthusiastically committed to being long-term donors and it has been one of the most rewarding decisions we've made together.

Have you ever seen elephants in the wild?

When we attended the IEF Symposium in South Africa in October 2019, we started by going on safari. The first animals we encountered were two elephant moms and their babies at the bridge leading to our lodge. Driving around with our guide for many days, we saw just about every animal one could possibly see in the area, including large and small elephant herds, and we would wait to watch interactions between herds. We had a baby male run at us trumpeting and waving his huge ears bluffingly trying to scare our Land Cruiser off under the watchful eyes of his mother. Unforgettable.

At the symposium Joe and I met the people running many of the IEF projects we support and were impressed by them all. Listening to them gave us a greater understanding of the passion these individuals have to see their elephant-protection missions succeed. We also interacted with rescued elephants on land next to our Symposium site who were accustomed to people. We were able to feed and touch them - and get splashed with water by 3-year-old Bella when they went to their drinking troughs. What a treat to actually touch elephant skin, feed them by hand and look into their eyes up close!

Do you have future plans involving elephants or other wildlife?

Joe and I hope to attend the next in-person IEF Symposium in Chiang Mai this November. We've already found three ethically-run Elephant Sanctuaries we would like to visit near there. Right before Covid shut down travel plans, we had gotten our yellow fever shots to visit Uganda to see some of the projects led by people we had met at the IEF symposium, such as Mike Keigwin in Murchison Falls, and also to try to see gorillas in Rwanda. Hopefully we can still go there. Maybe we can later visit Zambia to see some of the projects we support there as well.

As you can tell, supporting the International Elephant Foundation has made a wonderful difference in our lives.

The Berrys have made a difference in the lives of elephants around the world. They have provided support to many projects throughout Asia and Africa. IEF is lucky to have such "effective altruists" in our corner, but more importantly, elephants are too.

Advisor Spotlight

DR. DENNIS SCHMITT

IEF has been fortunate to count incredible individuals as part of our team, both on our Board of Directors and as Advisors. In this spotlight, we celebrate someone who has served in both capacities. In the elephant world Dr. Dennis Schmitt needs no introduction. He is an accomplished veterinarian who has specialized in elephant medical and reproductive management for decades. He is the leading elephant reproductive physiologist in North America and was the leader in the first successful conception by artificial insemination of an elephant (an Asian) in June 1998. He has served on the IEF Board of Directors and now in semi-retirement is a valued member of our Advisors.

You have a long history with elephants, but how did you get started?

I was consulting for a local client that had his own exotic game ranch, in addition to his purebred beef ranch, where I was doing reproductive consulting and embryo transfer. Dickerson Park Zoo had just lost their consulting veterinarian, who moved away. I eventually agreed to work with Dickerson Park Zoo on a trial basis for six months. I ended up working at Dickerson Park Zoo as a part-time veterinarian from 1983 to 2000. During that time, we developed a method for collecting elephant semen, produced the first elephant calf from artificial insemination (AI), and treatment of the first successful survivor of Elephant Endotheliotrophic Herpesvirus (EEHV). That all resulted from a team of people interested in improving our understanding of elephant reproduction. The zoo was active in bringing female elephants from other facilities to be bred and returned to their home facility to give birth. That was my start in elephant medicine and reproductive physiology.

You are very involved in elephant reproduction. Tell us about those efforts.

My involvement in elephant reproduction grew out of my training in reproductive medicine while in veterinary college and my Master's and Ph.D., as well as becoming a specialist in veterinary reproduction. In the early 1980's we knew little about elephant reproductive physiology. With the efforts of Dickerson Park Zoo to breed outside elephants and our own cows, we had access to numerous blood samples and the technology of hormone assays on site, to learn much more. In addition, the Indianapolis Zoo was also working on elephant reproductive physiology (Africans). The first successful AI was the result of daily progesterone hormone monitoring for the timing of AI. However, with the discovery of two Luteinizing Hormone (LH) surges (Indianapolis) which is unique to elephants during each cycle, the scheduling of AI's became more efficient. The first LH surge is not ovulatory or fertile, but the second LH surge, which occurs about 3 weeks later, is ovulatory and fertile. In addition to learning about the LH timing, we were able to develop a way to image the reproductive tracts of elephants using ultrasound to determine their suitability for breeding both naturally and with AI. As a result of these technologies I began to provide consulting services to other elephant facilities for reproductive management and elephant health. During this time, one of my clients was Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus (Feld Entertainment subsidiary) who had the largest herd of elephants in human care outside of Asian elephant range countries. I became the Director of Veterinary Care and Research and Conservation for Ringling Bros. in 2004 and maintained my laboratory and Professorship at Missouri State University. I worked for Feld until the Ringling Bros. Center for Elephant Conservation (CEC) was sold in 2019. Feld Entertainment allowed me to learn so much more about elephant reproduction and they provided my services to other elephant facilities in North America as well as in range countries. I was able to convince a former Master's Degree student of mine, Dr. Wendy Kiso, who had completed a Ph. D. at Smithsonian Institution to join me at the Ringling Bros. Center for Elephant Conservation (CEC). Today Wendy and I continue to provide reproductive consultations to elephant facilities including AI.

How many elephant births have you been a part of?

I have attended 68 elephant births, almost all in North America. In addition, I have provided advice to several other elephant facilities having questions about their impending births or new born calves. Each birth provides its own unique challenges. The elephant is unique in its anatomy so calves have an extra three to four feet to travel internally before they are expelled from the birth canal. In addition, they have a very short umbilical cord that breaks before the calf is expelled. At times, the calf needs assistance in starting to breath and ultimately in nursing successfully.

What accomplishments regarding your work with elephants are you most proud?

That's a hard to answer. First, is the number of calves produced through AI, that may not have happened only using natural breeding, although natural breeding is more successful and should continue to be a priority. Secondly, the contributions to understanding elephant physiology that our work with the Ringling Bros elephant herd provided including reproduction. But most rewarding is the human relationships developed within the elephant community both in range countries and western countries. In addition, the opportunity to share our elephant knowledge through workshops at the CEC, including several at Riddles Elephant and Wildlife Sanctuary, and a few in range countries. Finally, the mentoring of four Master's students from Sri Lanka, and the many that were my graduate students at Missouri State University.

Taking care of the largest multigenerational breeding herd of endangered Asian elephants in the Western Hemisphere is a huge task. What made you get involved in global elephant conservation?

My first experience in global elephant conservation was with the IEF. I traveled to Sumatra about 20 years ago to provide veterinary supplies and examine elephants in several of the elephant camps. At the encouragement of Heidi Riddle, I became a member of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) a division of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). As a member, I grew more aware of the efforts needed for global elephant conservation. Later, I traveled to India to put on workshops for wildlife veterinarians and veterinary students with the support of IEF and Ringling Bros. CEC. There I also performed ultrasound exams on over 100 elephants in several government elephant camps. Following that were multiple trips over the years to Sri Lanka to work with the student research projects, and visits with wildlife veterinarians and other experts regarding elephant care. Our trips to Sri Lanka were funded by Feld Entertainment through the Ringling Bros. Center for Elephant Conservation.

You have worked with elephants all over the world in every management style and context. What is something you wish the general public understood more?

That habitat destruction and Human Elephant Conflict are at a critical stage for the survival of all elephants, but especially for Asian elephants. Also, that about a third of Asian elephants are currently managed intensively under human care, but remember that free-ranging elephants also are under human management systems with varying success.

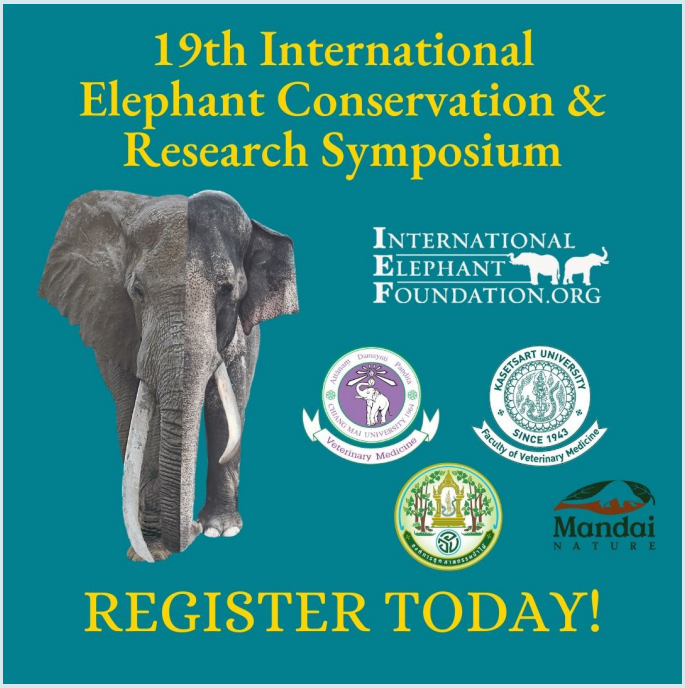
Tell us about your experience with IEF as a Board Member, supporter, and now Advisor.

My roles have changed over the years. As a founding IEF board member, it was a way to support international collaborations and fund smaller projects. As we all age, our roles change and last year as I turned 75, I decided to slow down. One of the ways was to retire from being an Active member of the IEF Board. But, as an advisor I can still contribute to the efforts of the IEF in international elephant conservation.

Besides elephants, do you have any interests or hobbies you are passionate about?

I am camping (RV'ing) much more with friends and with my wife, who has been and continues to support my passion for elephants, and am also learning to crappie fish. In a past life I competed in bass fishing tournaments from Lake Mead to the Southeastern United States. I no longer compete in bass tournaments but it doesn't diminish my determination to understand fish behavior and catch fish, even if I catch and release.

As you can see, every conversation with Dr. Schmitt is a learning opportunity, and he has always been more than generous with sharing his knowledge. IEF is lucky to have Dr. Schmitt as an Advisor, supporter, and friend.



Let's Go to Thailand!

19th International Elephant Conservation & Research Symposium

Join elephant experts, conservationists, researchers, and enthusiasts from around the world at the 19th International Elephant Conservation & Research Symposium in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The International Elephant Foundation, the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Chiang Mai University, the National Elephant Institute, and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Kasetsart University are hosting this incredible event on November 14-17, 2023 that will give you opportunities to build connections and learn about the latest outcomes in research and conservation. **Early Bird Registration ends October 13th!**