

# Close Encounters of the Endangered Kind



## Episode I: The Journey Begins by Tricia Berry

Another huge bull in musth almost collided with our Land Cruiser. If he was startled he didn't show it, but he did show he was annoyed. Again we were faced with a bull elephant who clearly had decided the road was his and his alone, and he was not going anywhere, but we were. He continued strutting directly toward us...

**We are three animal-loving Americans with a particular appreciation for elephants.** My husband Joe and I live in San Diego and are avid supporters of the U.S.-based International Elephant Foundation (IEF), and our companion was our friend and advisor Deborah Olson, Executive Director of IEF based in Fort Worth, Texas. The plan was to travel to Africa following central East Africa's rainy season to visit IEF conservation projects that Joe and I had been supporting in Zambia, Kenya and Uganda.



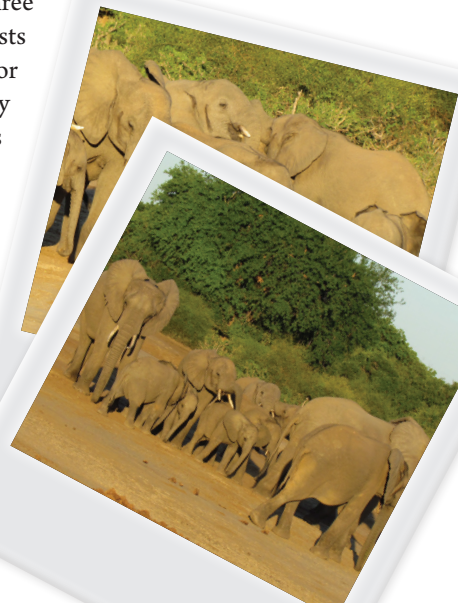
CONSERVATION IN ACTION

Debbie had put months into contacting all the program managers to make sure we could connect with them in a meaningful way within a three-week window. Now we would visit in person from halfway around the world. We had no idea how much more enlightening, rewarding, and somewhat dicey this trip would be from anything we could have imagined or arranged on our own. In my mind, no matter where you journey, that's the most exciting part - the unpredictability. And this trip had it in spades.

We made sure we were up-to-date on all immunizations and Visas required for the locations we were visiting, and tried to pack lightly. The clothes we packed were mostly in khaki shades of tan, brown and green so we would blend into the landscape while viewing wildlife. We had read not to wear black and blue clothes as those colors attract the nasty, aggressive Tsetse flies we might (and did) encounter. The sun seemed exceptionally bright in the countries we visited, so brimmed hats and sunglasses were important, too - not that I remembered to bring sunglasses. Few stores or pharmacies would be available to us so we needed to be prepared for our own specific needs.

Seeing any of these three African countries as tourists was pure bucket list stuff for me and Joe, but actually meeting people and animals we had a conservationists' connections with? It was an adventure that had the potential to top all previous adventures. How were we so fortunate?

Well, for more than five years I had been privileged to



work with Deborah Olson. She is one of the most dedicated, practical and discerning nonprofit directors I've met since I started supporting environmental charities as an adult. Over the years, she has helped me select which of each year's approved IEF Grant proposals I could support. That led to us talking about visiting some of these projects. Joe and I wanted to actually see and experience the field conservation work we supported far from our home in San Diego. We were over the moon with excitement. It is not often that one actually gets to experience in person the work their conservation donations fund.

Meeting in NYC from our respective home cities, Debbie, Joe and I flew halfway around the world to our first stop in Nairobi, Kenya, with its 8-hour time change. We then rushed to catch a smaller jet to spend the night in Lusaka, Zambia, for another flight the next morning. On our second day in Africa, we flew to our final destination, this time in a very small 8-passenger plane. They actually still offered us drinks and snacks! We were nearly there, after almost 24 hours of traveling, and full of excited anticipation.



Walking on the tarmac to catch our flight to Lower Zambezi

We arrived mid-afternoon at the tiny airstrip serving Zambia's Lower Zambezi National Park (LZNP). LZNP is a 1,580 square mile protected area on the Zambezi River which separates the countries of Zambia and Zimbabwe - Zim and Zam as our hosts referred to the two countries. Although separated by a river, the two nations were cooperating to protect their wild animal populations and their genetic diversity as animals migrate between the countries. It was a short ride from the airstrip to finally arrive at our destination.

The IEF Zambian project we are supporting is the anti-poaching K9 ranger unit of the non-profit conservation organization Conservation Lower Zambezi (CLZ) - or "C L Zed" as they call it. Seeing those rangers and their four trained dogs in action would be tomorrow's highlight on our first full day in Zambia.



One of the CLZ rangers with his trained conservation dog.

### Next Episode:

## Close Encounters of the Hippo Kind

I kept remembering Disneyland's Jungle Cruise narrator using the script that assured us hippos are only dangerous when they wiggle their ears. All the hippos we passed were wiggling their ears.

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with IEF in **Kenya!**

November 2-13, 2025



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