

Questions from Our Followers

Part 2

Interview by Anthony Butler

DEBBIE: It doesn't matter where we go or who we speak to, it seems that absolutely everyone is interested in elephants.

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ANTHONY: Ira Wilson from Phoenix, Arizona would like to know: How fast can elephants run?

DEBBIE: Asian elephants can run about 15 miles per hour which is about the same for a fairly fast human. But African elephants can run much faster due to their size. Since they are so much larger than Asian elephants they can run about 25 miles per hour and unless you're Usain Bolt they can easily run down most humans. However, there is a slight caveat to this. Technically, for us to be able to say an animal runs they have to have lifted all four feet off the ground at the same exact time. Elephants are simply too heavy to do this so even though it looks like running they are actually walking very fast, scientifically speaking.

ANTHONY: How big are African elephants?

DEBBIE: Simply speaking a full grown African elephant is absolutely massive. An average full grown elephant grows from 10 to 13 feet depending on whether they are male to female. Also elephants continue to grow throughout their entire life so due to poaching taking the oldest individuals we've seen their size decreasing.

ANTHONY: Miles Berry from Charlottesville, North Carolina said: I heard that African elephants were actually larger than a Woolly Mammoth – is this true?

DEBBIE: Yes, it's true! Woolly Mammoth's are more closely related to Asian elephants than they are to African elephants and today's African elephants are actually larger than a Woolly Mammoth. Isn't that crazy?

ANTHONY: Okay I have a question from Mark Centerage from Steptoe, Nevada: What inspired you to work with elephants?

DEBBIE: I started following a small group of elephants in Kenya when I was eight years old. I grew up in a small farm town in Hubbard, Oregon when I first saw an episode on television about this one elephant in particular named Eleanor who fascinated me like no other. I went to libraries and began copying down everything I could find out about her and the others they talked about. They were elephants rescued by the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust who rescues baby elephants after their families have been poached and then releases them all back into the wild. Over the years I collected absolutely everything I could about them and even wrote to their organization. I noticed the DSWT had organized their data by year instead of by elephant so once they put it up online I organized it all by elephant. Then you could actually see what happened to that elephant, who it hung out with, where it went, and all the events of it's life in one place instead of spread across years. Then in 2014 I went there and gave them everything I had because I thought it told the most incredible story.

ANTHONY: And that's what you talk about in your book?

DEBBIE: That's right. I tell their stories in my book as well as my own.

ANTHONY: Great, thank you very much.

DEBBIE: It was my pleasure.