

Elephant Teeth: Where Ivory Comes From

Debbie Ethell: Elephant teeth are just one of the ways that we use to tell the age of an elephant.

An elephant tusk is actually an elephant's largest tooth. This is the same tooth as our incisor tooth and a single tusk of a full grown elephant can easily weigh over 100 pounds.

The size of an elephants tusk isn't always a good indicator of age. Male elephant tusks grow throughout their entire life while female tusks reach their maximum size in their twenties.

Hi everyone I'm Debbie Ethell, executive director of The KOTA Foundation for Elephants as well as a conservation research scientist.

Elephants have six sets of teeth, or molars, and each one is an indication of its age. Each molar grows in from the back to the front, as the front breaks off and wears down with age its replaced with the one from the back just like a conveyor belt.

The sixth set of molars comes in around the age of 40 and that lasts for the rest of their life. This is one more way scientists have been able to tell how long elephants are supposed to live. And this is why it doesn't make any sense when we hear that an elephant died of old age at the age of 40 when it's last set of teeth, which is supposed to last for decades, hasn't even come in yet.

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