

Questions from Our Followers: How Long Do African Elephants Live?

Interview by Lisa Westom

DEBBIE ETHELL: One thing I've realized is that no matter where you are or what job you work...everyone loves elephants.

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LISA WESTOM: Sara Wright from Phoenix, Arizona would like to know: How Long Do Elephants Live?

DEBBIE: In the wild, they live as long as we do about 70 years or so.

LISA: How can you tell how old an elephant is?

DEBBIE: There are a few ways but one of them is by their teeth. Elephants have six sets of teeth with the last coming in around the age of 40 years old. Depending on which set of teeth an elephant has helps us determine an approximate age.

LISA: Alex Lapier from Sandusky, Ohio asked: What is the oldest elephant in captivity?

DEBBIE: Packy at the Oregon Zoo died at 54 and he still holds the record as the oldest elephant living in a zoo, though this was an outlier. The median age for elephants living in captivity is only around 20 years old which is only about a quarter of their life span.

LISA: What was your first experience with an elephant?

DEBBIE: My first experience with an elephant is actually one that I have no memory of. I was about 18 months old and I went to visit the Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle with my parents and my grandmother. I was sitting on my grandmother's shoulders when a young elephant at the zoo,

named Watoto, grabbed me around the waist with her trunk and lifted me off of my grandmother's shoulders. When my grandmother realized it wasn't my parents lifting me but an elephant she screamed...tell the rest of the story.

LISA: Okay we have one last question from Lena Sacks in Traverse City, Michigan who wants to know: How do you tell African elephants apart? Or do they all look the same?

DEBBIE: That is a great question. One way to tell them apart is by the shape of their ears. Every elephant has an ear shape that is completely unique to them just as our fingerprints are to us. But elephant keepers in Kenya can tell the difference between hundreds of elephants simply by identifying several features such as their faces or unique features and personalities just as you and I can recognize people in a large crowd. It's quite amazing.

LISA: Well thank you for allowing us all to learn more about elephants. That was amazing.

DEBBIE: It was fun, wasn't it?

DEBBIE: (outro with music): Is there something you've always wanted to know about elephants but didn't where or who to ask? Put your question in the comments below and we just may include it in a future episode. Thank you for watching another episode of The Elephant in the Room.