

## ELEMENTARY SCIENCE SECTION

### THE EMPEROR OF THE JUNGLE

THE largest and most powerful of living land animals at the present time is the elephant, which can usually overcome the attacks of any other inhabitant of the jungle. Therefore the elephant may be called "the emperor of the jungle." Far better than the lion, it deserves the title "the king of beasts."

Although fossil remains of various kinds of elephants are found in every zone of the eastern and western continents, the elephant is today represented by only two species, the African and the Asiatic. The African elephant is the larger of the two species. It attains eleven feet in height, while the Asiatic elephant never exceeds ten feet. The African representative also has larger ears and larger, coarser teeth.

The forehead of the African elephant is convex, while that of the Asiatic species is concave. The trunk of the African type appears regularly ridged, as if it were segmented, and the margins of the end form *two* prehensile finger-like tips. The trunk of the Asiatic elephant is smooth and tapering, and it has but *one* prehensile tip. In both species the trunk is formed by the union of the nose with the upper lip.

In the African species both male and female elephants have tusks, but only male Asiatic elephants are tusked. In Ceylon even the males are usually without tusks.

The food of the African variety consists of roots, which it digs with its tusks, and of boughs, shrubs, and small trees. The food of the Asiatic variety is less coarse; it consists of grains, fruits, sugar cane, bamboo shoots, grasses, leaves, and juicy plants.



*African Elephants*

In both species the position of the hind leg is such as to cause it to bend like the foreleg, giving the elephant a strange gait when compared with that of the horse.

The habits of the two species are similar. All elephants are

social, and herds numbering from 10 to 100 or more, usually led by females, are found in forests in the neighborhood of streams, although they move into open country during the rainy season, and may even ascend high mountains. "Rogue" elephants are males which remain permanently separated from the herd.

Elephants frequently migrate with the change of seasons to find better feeding grounds. Like horses, they sleep either standing up or lying down, usually in the

middle of the night and the heat of the day. In captivity they may not lie down for weeks, and individuals have been known to remain on their feet for five years.

The elephant is an excellent swimmer, and instances are recorded of animals which swam continuously for six hours in water more than thirty feet deep. Elephants cannot leap, and never have all four feet off the ground at the same time. They show remarkable speed in running in spite of their ungainly size.

The elephant is timid and inoffensive in its nature, but becomes dangerous when enraged. It expresses its emotions in a definite manner. When about to charge an enemy, it utters a loud, shrill "trump", and rolls up its sensitive trunk out of danger. When pleased, it squeaks or purrs softly. Rage is expressed by a roar, and suspicion by rapping the trunk on the ground and emitting from it a volume of air with the sound of crinkling tin.

Wild elephants use branches of trees to brush away the flies, or, if they cannot secure branches, throw grass or spout water over the body to keep the flies away. The naked skin of the animal is very sensitive.

Naturalists say that the intelligence of the elephant is usually over-rated. It is, however, very docile and obedient, and is easily trained. The elephant in captivity is a patient and faithful servant of man, quick to learn and to obey orders.

In India and Burma elephants are regularly employed in industries requiring heavy work, in all of which they exercise care and accuracy, two or more animals working together in much the same way as do human beings. They haul logs and lift and carry timbers or boxes containing supplies. An elephant

is capable of carrying half a ton over a level country. In hauling heavy loads a regular harness is employed. This consists of a leather collar around the neck to which a dragging rope is attached. Elephants are also sometimes hitched to wagons or plows.

For riding, a padded saddle is usually placed on the back of the elephant, and on this is bound a box, called the *howdah*, which holds from two to six passengers. The driver, called the *mahout*, sits astride the elephant's neck.

In Siam white elephants or albinos are esteemed as sacred.

Elephants seldom breed in captivity. In the wild state one calf, rarely two, is produced at birth. So great is the mother's care that a baby elephant rarely dies. When on the march, mothers and young go in advance, but if an alarm is sounded, they immediately fall back and the old males go to the front. The young one returns its mother's affection, and resists to the utmost any indignity offered to her.

Elephant hide, when tanned, makes very strong, durable leather. The flesh is eaten by some native tribes of Africa. Since earliest times elephants have been killed for their ivory tusks. Before hunting was restricted in Africa, tens of thousands of these animals were killed every year by ivory hunters.

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#### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many and what species of elephants exist today?
2. Can you tell some of the differences between these species?
3. Can you tell some of the habits of elephants?
4. How are elephants useful?