



A wish on the way

The coming of summer rains heralds the arrival of a new member for the 'W' family of elephants in Hwange Estate.

It's the wet season in untamed Zimbabwe and that means memorable sightings of new-born elephants on the Hwange Estate. The 'W' family arrives at Mpofu Pan, one of six pans recently scooped, and I search for Whosit – the 14-year-old daughter of the affable elephant named Whole – who I know will soon give birth for the first time. I hope, like others after delivering their firstborn, she'll finally acquire better manners.

Whosit and I have regular one-sided conversations, to which she contributes a nod and a rumble every now and again. With her small tusks always menacingly close to my 4x4 windows, there's plenty of crooning, smiles and laugh-out-loud moments. Not to mention a repeated reprimand or two. For a few blissful moments, she's as quiet as a koala, but by now I know better. She's not asleep; just pretending – and like all of the high-spirited Presidential elephants, impossible to forget.

Whole, following the death of her three-year-old son, Wholesome – from a strangling neck-snare in 2004 – hasn't completely lost that forlorn look in her amber eyes. The extended 'W' family, now numbering more than 50, mercifully suffered no new snare



- Whosit was grief-stricken when her younger brother, Wholesome, was killed by a poacher's snare. Now she has
- a child of her own on the way.

wounds during 2009 – thanks largely to the relentless efforts of the anti-poaching teams that patrol regularly.

My feet firmly planted in the soil of Africa, with an evening glass of Amarula in hand, I revel in the calming rhythm of the elephants

walking along paths made by the repeated passage of animals through the now-leafy bush. I think about what I'll name Whosit's baby when it arrives. Too special to be earth-bound, I decide, her elephant-child shall be called Wish. ■

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