



Getaway Elephant Ambassador

Sharon Pincott

Special magic

Frequently, these days, I'm asked why my focus has changed from conservation to tourism. In fact my focus hasn't altered at all; it's merely broadened. I've come to believe the return of tourists is crucial to the preservation of Zimbabwe's wildlife, including its flagship herd of elephants. Creating awareness and encouraging tourism is therefore a key part of the ongoing wildlife conservation battle.

My first treasured sighting of the well-known 'W' family with baby Wish in tow happened while I was accompanying an Ivory Lodge game-drive. Grandmother Whole responded instantly to my voice and approached enthusiastically to within one metre. The guests sat awestruck, cameras clicking. She chose to stay close by, skilfully ripping grass. Then we drove towards Whole's daughter, Whosit, and enjoyed a fantastic close encounter with her first-born, Wish, while I shared intimate details of family relationships and past happenings.

I'm reminded just how special encounters like these are when even professional guides and Zimbabweans accustomed to game drives and big-game encounters declare that their moments among the Presidential Elephants will stay with them forever. I also recall the

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memorable day last September when the much-needed Hwange Estate panscooping began. While transporting the bulldozer operator and low-bed driver through the area called Kanondo, Wilma (Whole's sister) appeared at the tree-line and, when called, lumbered straight to my door. Neither African man had ever seen an elephant in the wild before, let alone one responding in this way. Looking at me sideways, the low-bed driver whispered with a half-grin: 'Arrhhh, but now I am scared of you. You have very special magic.'

It is in fact these affable elephants who possess 'special magic'. This environment is not contrived. It is, I feel sure, how all wild jumbos once were, before humankind gave them reason to fear.

Do plan to visit the Presidential Elephants, as they symbolise hope – for the wildlife, for Hwange and for Zimbabwe.

Ed's note: *This is the last report in the magazine from our Elephant Ambassador. It's not the end, however, merely the beginning of a new adventure on-line as Sharon moves to a blog on www.getaway.co.za, where she will keep you up to date.*



• **ABOVE AND TOP:** The Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe are a symbol of hope.

Win Q: What elephants will you encounter while staying at Ivory Lodge in Hwange?

Getaway, in conjunction with Ivory Lodge, is giving away two nights for two people in tree-house accommodation at Ivory Lodge in Hwange, on a full-board, shared, basis, worth R3000. Also included are two afternoon game drives accompanied by our Elephant Ambassador, Sharon Pincott (author of *The Elephants and I*), who will join you for dinner afterwards. Estate fees (US\$10 a person per entry), drinks and transfers to/from camp are extra. Offer must be taken up by end 2010. **SMS** Elephants, followed by your answer, name, e-mail and postal addresses to 34419 (SMSs cost R2), or enter **on-line** at www.getaway.co.za/competitions. The closing date is 27 July 2010. See competition rules on page 179.



■ You can help keep the pumps going to fill Hwange National Park's water pans. Deposit your donation into the Save Hwange Trust account, 6209-3759-086, First National Bank, Sea Point, branch number 201809. For more information, tel 0861-312-312, web www.flameofafrica.com.