

# CREATION SINGS.....*Pachyderms*

They are amongst the most fascinating of God's creatures and iconic symbols in their own right. Firstly a few facts...according to the Great Elephant Census 2016, not all had packed their trunks—there were 350,000 remaining on the savannahs. Large numbers? Perhaps not, when you read that since 2007 there has been a reduction of 144,000! In 2014, the World Wildlife Fund released a report saying that at the current rate of decline, 100% of these wild vertebrates (elephants, lions, wildebeests...) will be **gone** by **2026!**

Elephants' range (the area they live in) can be over 1500 sq. km and they may travel as much as 60 km daily. They are highly intelligent and possibly even conscious (self-aware and empathetic), and no species on earth has a more complex society than that of elephants. The core of their social arrangements is a 'family', usually four or five females and their young, led by a Matriarch who is a mother, grandmother, great grandmother, sister or aunt to most of them. **No** males [*cheering from the female readers!*]. Males are only needed for breeding, and as calves only become self-sufficient after about four years, the male must be ready to find and defend a mate. He checks if she is ready to mate by using his trunk to sniff her urine, and God has designed it so that he can detect minute changes in the female hormone oestrogen by doing so. Now that's incredible—modern science uses all sorts of fancy machines to detect such changes. It is no wonder then that the brain of an elephant is large and incredibly complex. It is said that "an elephant never forgets" but I can't remember who said it! [*Pause for laughter.*] And while on that subject, do you know why African elephants have Big Ears? No? Well, because Noddy wouldn't pay the ransom! Back to our article ...

These families are part of wider 'kinship' groups who regularly encounter one another, and on top of this there is the 'clan' which forms up in the dry season. Elephants can be friends with 100-200 individuals and can maintain meaningful social relationships—without Facebook! So, they have enormous memories... with the equivalent area of the brain (hippocampus) about 40% larger than in humans.

The value of memories grows with age, and in times of trouble such as local drought this knowledge permits them to lead their groups to other, richer pastures. Such information is passed down the generations by experience, and the ability of the young to benefit by it and learn from the wisdom of the old is one of the most important reasons for the existence of groups. Another important advantage is 'collective defence' from predators like lions and hyenas. One final thing about elephants is their reaction to their dead. They will visit them repeatedly, sniffing them with their trunks and rumbling as they do. They don't do this with other animal corpses...and just as I was writing this I saw a snip of a programme where an elephant caressed a single radio-tracking collar taken from an elephant killed by poachers, from several hanging on a rail...he obviously knew it belonged to a friend.

So what can we learn? Value our families and clans. People are very important to us in life. In our families and churches, stick together for collective defence so that the enemy – 1 Peter 5v8 – may not succeed in picking us off as we stray. Even though there has been a huge decline in all things 'church' we must not give up, because it is HIS church and HE will BUILD it. It is important that the elders show the younger how to live in difficult circumstances and it is the responsibility of the younger to learn all they can. Commit to memory all these things so that in hard times of spiritual drought or wilderness experience we may remember where to go in the Word to find rich pasture!

Finally, to the Matriarchs in the Church family, keep on leading, and shame on us men who don't!