

Elephants

Elephants are the largest animals that live on land. The biggest elephants – African elephants - can weigh up to six tons, or 12,000 pounds! That's about the weight of more than two hundred average kids! An adult elephant can be more than 10 feet tall. Elephants are vegetarians. They eat fruit, plants, tree bark, grass and roots. These huge animals usually walk at pace of about four or five miles per hour, but they can charge (run) as fast as 25 miles per hour. It is very hard to stop a charging elephant, even for animals that can run much faster.

Male elephants are called bulls and female elephants are called cows. Both bulls and cows have tusks, but the cow's tusks are smaller. While tusks may seem like weapons, elephants use them mostly to dig for water and salt. Elephants also have very large ears. Their ears are designed to cool their blood. When an elephant flaps its ears, cool air moves over its skin.

Female elephants usually have babies every 3 to 4 years. A mother elephant is very protective of her young and will attack without warning if she thinks her baby is in danger.

The only natural enemies of elephants are people. In fact, one of the biggest threats to elephants is a group of people called poachers. Poachers kill elephants for their valuable ivory tusks even though it is illegal. If an elephant can avoid being poached, it can live up to 70 years. As elephants grow older, their teeth wear away, so very old elephants usually move into swamps where they can eat soft plants without having to chew them.

The habits of elephants are actually very important to the survival of small animals. When they dig for water, elephants are not the only ones to drink it. Birds and insects also drink water from holes in the ground made by elephants. Elephants also create passages through the jungle for small animals when they eat large bushes. These small animals could otherwise be trapped in small areas and unable to find food. Unfortunately, a herd of elephants can also destroy a farming village by trampling huts and crops.

Today there are only about 500,000 elephants left in the wild in Africa. In the 1950's, there were more than 5 million! Elephants are disappearing mostly because of poachers and because people are taking over their land. In Africa, people are trying to conserve elephants by taking serious steps to punish poachers and by setting aside special land for them.

Elephants Questions

1. Elephants are
 - a. the largest animal in the world.
 - b. the tallest animal in the world.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these

2. Which of the following is not something an elephant would eat?
 - a. tree bark
 - b. fruit
 - c. plant roots
 - d. animal bones

3. A male elephant is called a _____.

4. A female elephant is called a _____.

5. Elephants usually use their tusks to
 - a. attack enemies.
 - b. dig holes.
 - c. play with other elephants.
 - d. feel their way in the dark.

6. Elephants use their big ears to
 - a. swat flies.
 - b. shade themselves.
 - c. cool their blood.
 - d. None of these

7. Poachers are
 - a. people who kill elephants for their tusks.
 - b. people who protect elephants.
 - c. people who take over elephants' land.
 - d. people who steal elephants.

Name _____



Date _____

Elephants Answers

1. a
2. d
3. bull
4. cow
5. b
6. c
7. a
8. c
9. Birds and insects drink water from holes in the ground made by elephants. Elephants create passages through the jungle for small animals when they eat large bushes.
10. c