

**Meisterhafte Fotokunst und ein großartiges Plädoyer
für die Erhaltung einer majestätischen Art**

Die Intelligenz und das Gedächtnis von Elefanten sind legendär. Umso erschreckender ist ihre barbarische Verfolgung durch Wilderer und die Rasanzen, mit der ihre Bestände sinken.

Während Art Wolfe mit seinen faszinierenden Fotografien afrikanischen und asiatischen Elefanten ein emotionales Denkmal setzt, konzentriert sich der Text auf Samuel Wassers bahnbrechende Methoden zur Bekämpfung des illegalen Elfenbeinhandels.

Mit Hilfe der Wissenschaft gelang es dem »Sherlock Holmes des Welttierhandels«, die Herkunft der Schmuggelware zu lokalisieren und somit durchschlagende Erfolge im Kampf gegen die Wilderei zu erzielen.

Ein beeindruckendes Porträt der charismatischen Tiere und der Menschen, die sich für sie einsetzen.

Art Wolfe / Samuel Wasser
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HOFFNUNG FÜR
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The mahout was still looking for the tiger on the ground, and I gently nudged him and pointed out where the tiger was. As soon as he saw the tiger above us, he knew this was not a good situation. Off we went at breakneck speed through the forest on the little elephant, who had a better understanding of the situation than we did. Branches whacked us in the face, as we were really not concerned with finding a clear path, but only the most direct route away from the angry cat. I got three shots out of that morning: the tiger illuminated by the single shaft of sunlight; the angry tiger snarling from the crotch of a tree at close range; and a motion shot of the back of the mahout as we bounced through the forest.

On another occasion I traveled to Amboseli National Park in Kenya. Amboseli is close to the Tanzanian border, not far from Mount Kilimanjaro, a volcanic massif that hovers over Amboseli and irrigates



the region with water. The park would be quite dry if it weren't for this. The freshwater pools attract all sorts of iconic wildlife, including elephants that come off the lower slopes of the mountain.

Unless you want to pay a fine, tourists need to be back in the lodge before sunset. Of course, as photographers, we pushed our drivers to press against the limits of this strict curfew. We wanted to photograph in that beautiful light just before sunset. We would take our "sundowner" after sundown at the lodge, thank you!

We were driving rather fast around a bend and suddenly the driver slammed on the brakes. There was a little lump of gray in the middle of the road, and at first glance I didn't recognize what it was. In fact, it was a very, very young elephant calf napping in the dusty road. The mother was nearby, feeding in the bushes while her baby slept soundly. We were all tossed forward and startled by the sudden stop. Meanwhile, the calf wiggled around, got up, and walked under the front wheel well of our Land Rover, which tells you how small it was. It blithely started rubbing its back against the wheel well when the mother noticed and became enraged that we were there and her baby was interacting with the vehicle. She came up to the Land Rover and put her trunk through the passenger seat window and bugled an eardrum-shattering call. The driver told us we were in extreme danger and not to bat an eye or twitch a muscle. With streams of sweat running from his brow down his face, he remained very still as the elephant violently waved its trunk around the inside of the vehicle. Once again, I didn't get the shot, but the memory is indelible. I think I lost 10 percent of my hearing that day.

Over the years, I have had encounters where elephants charged me when I was on foot. More recently, in Zimbabwe's Mana Pools National Park, we encountered an elephant with her two offspring, one probably about seven years old, the other maybe one, and I made a mistake. I walked beyond the line of a fallen log and put myself out there as a silhouette. Stupid is as stupid does, but at that point I thought she had come to terms with my presence. But she hadn't, and the minute I stepped over the log she charged. I jumped back behind the log as she struck it. My guide, my friend, and I watched as the large limb that she broke off sailed over our heads.

That was a sobering encounter, but it also spoke to how we perceive these animals, at our own peril, as big, gray, cuddly, and dopey. They are very instinctual, strong, and alert, and they're deadly when threatened. In that moment I knew that the animal before me had had a negative encounter with humans elsewhere, outside the protection of the park. Her instinct was to strike first and eliminate the danger to her calves.

THE NUMBERS GAME

On a shoot made expressly for this book, I traveled to Chad to photograph the last, largest herd of elephants. Chad is surrounded by the Sahara to the north, Sudan to the east, Niger and Nigeria to the west, and the Central African Republic to the south. All these bor-

derlands do not a nice neighborhood make. Civil wars abound, and in order to fund them, Sudan's Janjaweed militia sneaks into Chad specifically to poach elephants. In fact, such incursions were the reason that these elephants had formed such a large herd; they massed for safety. Normally they band together in much smaller bond groups and clans, but in this particular case, some four hundred elephants had grouped into a megaherd. I really wanted to photograph this phenomenon.

Chad's Zakouma National Park is an immense area with only a couple of camps to stay in. Political uncertainty, limited space, and its remoteness make for a spectacular wildlife location in the heart of Africa. During the wet season, vast marshes are created and there are hundreds of bird species to be seen, along with lions, buffalo, and giraffes.

Scouting from a vehicle, we caught glimpses of elephants, but they would quickly disappear into the thick acacia forest. We realized very quickly that this was not the way to photograph these animals. Up until around 2012, Janjaweed had terrorized the elephants, killing thousands. While four hundred sounds like a lot to see at one time, it is but a remnant of the throngs that once lived there. We were able to hire the Cessna Caravan charter plane that brought us, then we took the doors off, duct-taped ourselves into the back opening of the plane, and found the herd of elephants. As we circled the large herd I was able to get shots reminiscent of the photographs Peter Beard took more than a half-century earlier in Kenya, before the widespread and systematic slaughter of elephants for the ivory trade.

I shared these photos at the Zakouma headquarters of African Parks, a nonprofit conservation group. This was vital information for the organization's staff, as they cannot afford to fly and take census counts as often as they would like. When photographers like me are able to take fairly clear and sharp shots of a herd that show details, it's very valuable to them. In this particular case, they were eager to count calves. It was a hopeful sign to see that there have been more and more born in the past few years. This is largely thanks to the work of African Parks and its anti-poaching efforts, including a team of armed rangers known as the Mambas who track and protect the herd. Their success in anti-poaching measures has resulted in an increasing number of baby elephants as well as the breakup of the large herd into the smaller family groups that are normal for the species.

CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHY AND SPECIES SURVIVAL

You can imagine the number of encounters I have had over the years with wildlife, most of them positive experiences. My archive is a treasure chest as well as a time capsule stretching back to the late 1970s. That future generations would know elephants only through the work of painters and photographers or from zoos is unacceptable. To lose an animal of such importance and strength and sensitivity is unacceptable.



I took on this book project safe in the knowledge that I already had good photos, but these were simply not enough. Over the past few years I have taken every opportunity to return to Africa and record more of these remarkable creatures. In the age of digital I can get shots I could never even have thought about twenty years ago, during the film days.

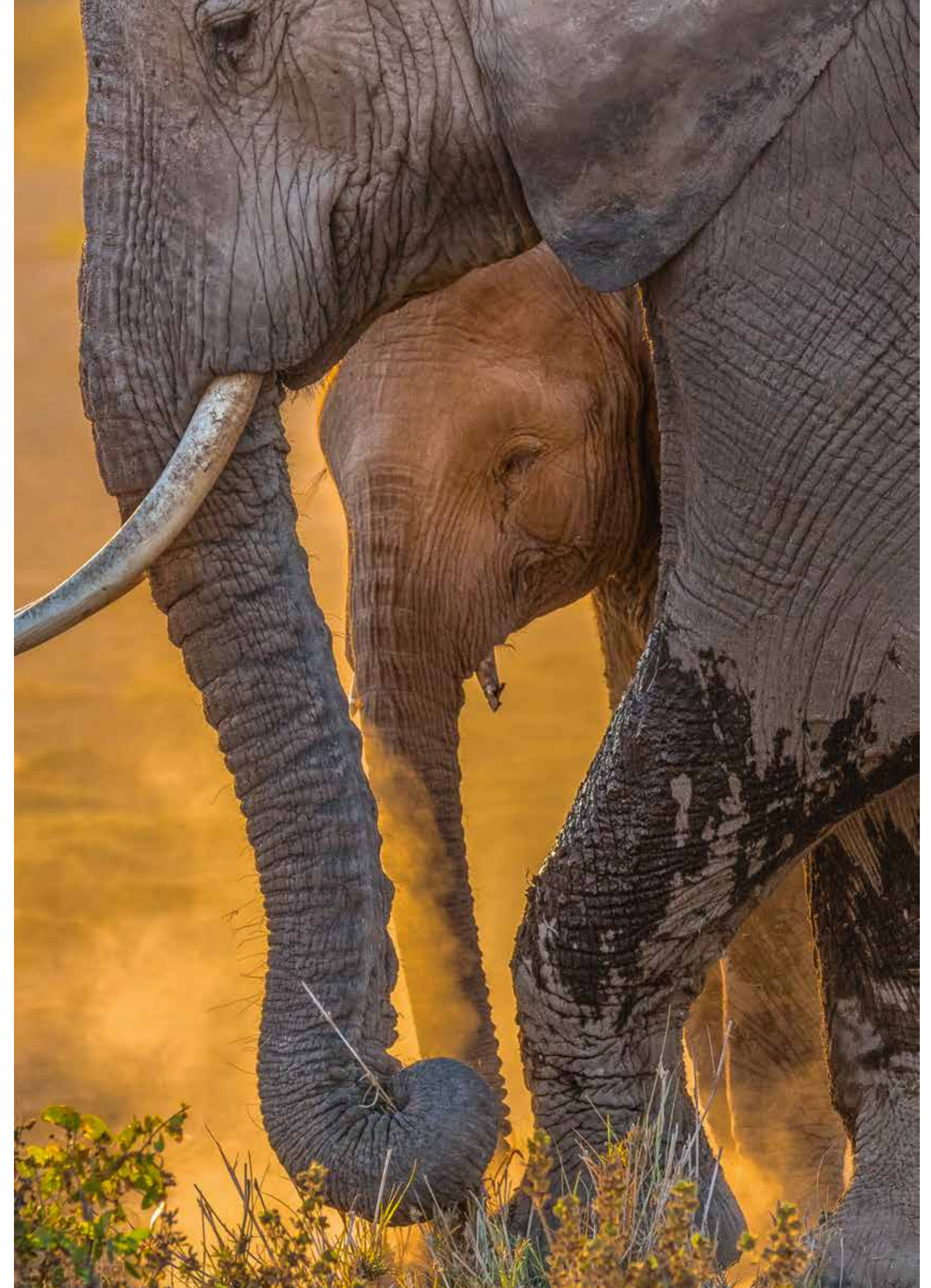
This book is highly important to me, and it is highly important that people are aware of the magnitude of what is going on in Africa and Asia. When I published my book *The Living Wild* in 2000, there were nearly six hundred thousand African elephants. Now, according to the late Paul G. Allen's Great Elephant Census, that number has been cut nearly in half. Wild Asian elephants are in decline as well. We have this perception that the good guys are always going to take care of the ills that plague us, but this book is a participatory call to arms. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to contribute, write letters, vote, and put pressure on the powers that be to push back against poaching and the international cartels behind them. If we don't succeed in that mission, these animals and many others will be lost. I hope you will use the resource list at the back of this book to learn more about and support the nongovernmental organizations working for the survival of elephants.

OPPOSITE, TOP, ABOVE: African bush elephants, Etosha National Park, Namibia
FOLLOWING PAGES: African bush elephants, Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya





PREVIOUS PAGES: Close-ups of African bush elephants, Zakouma National Park, Chad
ABOVE, OPPOSITE: African bush elephant, Zakouma National Park, Chad



ABOVE: African bush elephants, Chobe National Park, Botswana | OPPOSITE: African bush elephant and calf, Amboseli National Park, Kenya
FOLLOWING PAGES: African bush elephants backlit by the setting sun, Okavango Delta, Botswana | PAGES 192-193: African bush elephants, Okavango Delta, Botswana