

# ELEPHANTS

THEIR HISTORY

In antiquity , mythology and religion

## INTRODUCTION

Elephants are the largest land animals. Many species of whales and some sharks are larger. There are three species: the African elephant, which ranges across much of sub-Saharan Africa; the forest elephant which lives in rain forests in Africa and the Asian elephant, which is found in South Asia, Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Scientists decided to make the forest elephant a separate species in the 2002 based on genetic differences.

Elephants are sometimes referred to as "pachyderms" (meaning "thick skinned"). A male elephant is called a bull. A female is called a cow. Young are called calves. A group is called a herd.



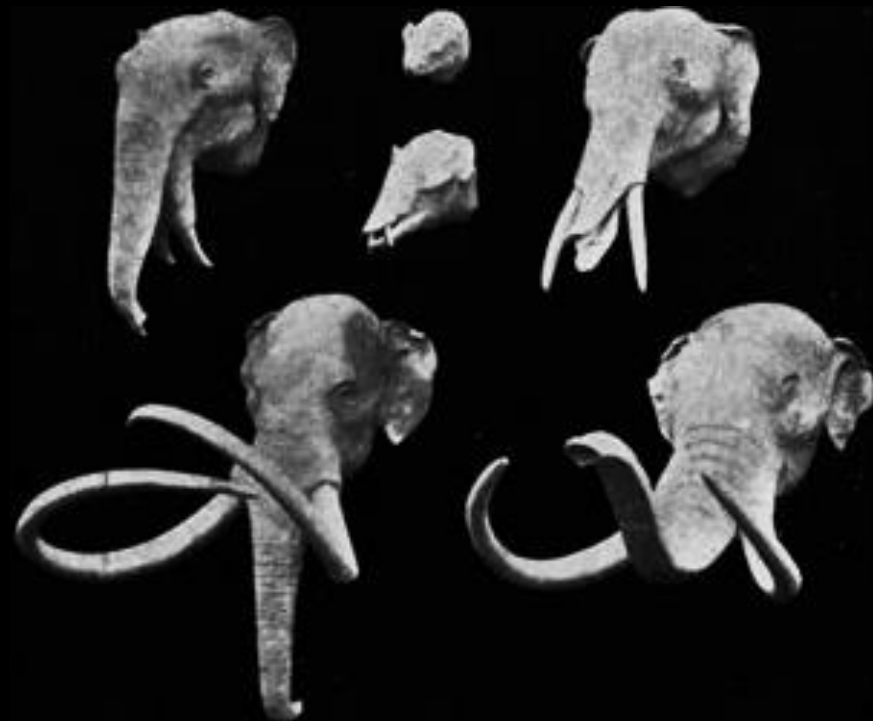
## HISTORY OF ELEPHANTS

The ancestor of elephants, mammoths and mastodons was a pig-size animal with an upper lip like a tapir that lived about 55 million years ago. As these creatures evolved their heads got small and their upper lip became longer and more flexible until it became a trunk.

More than 250 species of elephants and elephant-like creatures have roamed the earth in the past. Ancestors of the elephant include the *Moeritherium* (a pig-like animal that lived 40 million to 30 million years ago), the *Piomia* (a pig-like animal with a long snout that lived 37 million to 28 million years ago), *Deinotherium* (an elephant-like animal with downward-hooking tusks that lived 24 million to 1.8 million years ago), the *Primelephas* (an animal that looked like a modern elephant and lived from 6.2 million to 5 million years ago).

## ASIAN ELEPHANT RANGE AND NUMBERS

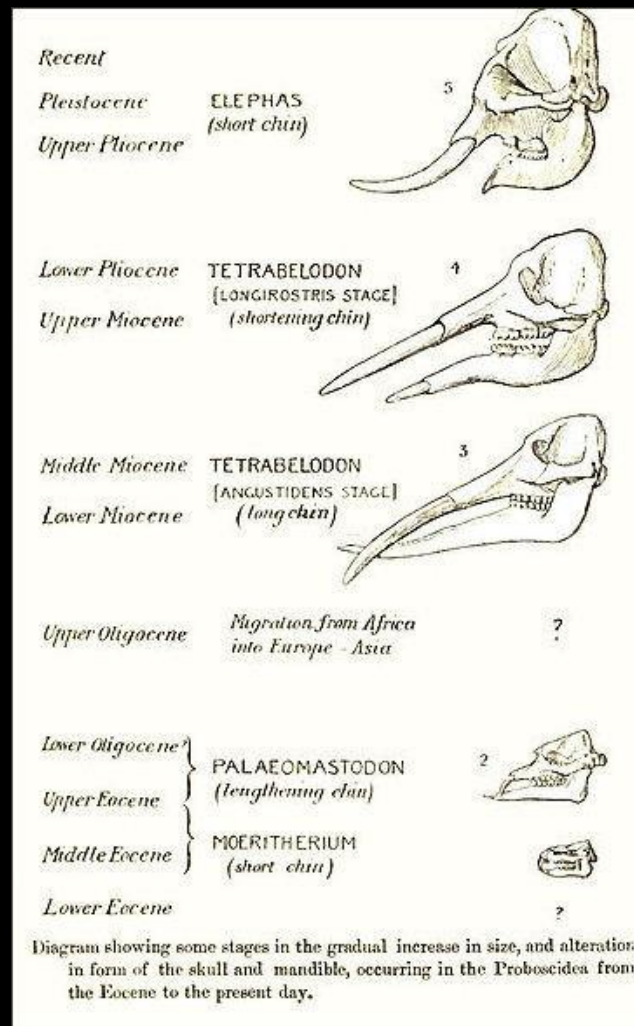
Asian elephants are found in 13 countries. The WWF estimates that there are only between 34,000 and 51,000 Asian elephants worldwide, including 12,000 to 16,000 animals that have either been domesticated in Asia or are in zoos around the world. By contrast, there are an estimated 550,000 elephants in Africa today (2003).



## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASIAN ELEPHANTS AND AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

Asian elephants have an arched back, two watermelon-size humps on their forehead, relatively small tusks, four toes on their front feet, smoother skin, relatively small ears that fold forward and are shaped like India, and a single finger-like protuberance at the tip of their trunk. Only males have tusks.

Adult male Asian elephants weigh up to four tons and stand 9 to 10½ feet tall at the shoulder, and females weigh as much 3.3 tons. The largest Asian elephant was an animal found in Nepal named Tula hatti ("the great elephant") that stood 11 feet at the shoulder and had a foot print that measured 22 inches across. Their mellow temperament allows them to be trained for entertainment in circuses and heavy labor such as lifting logs onto trucks and pulling them through the forest.

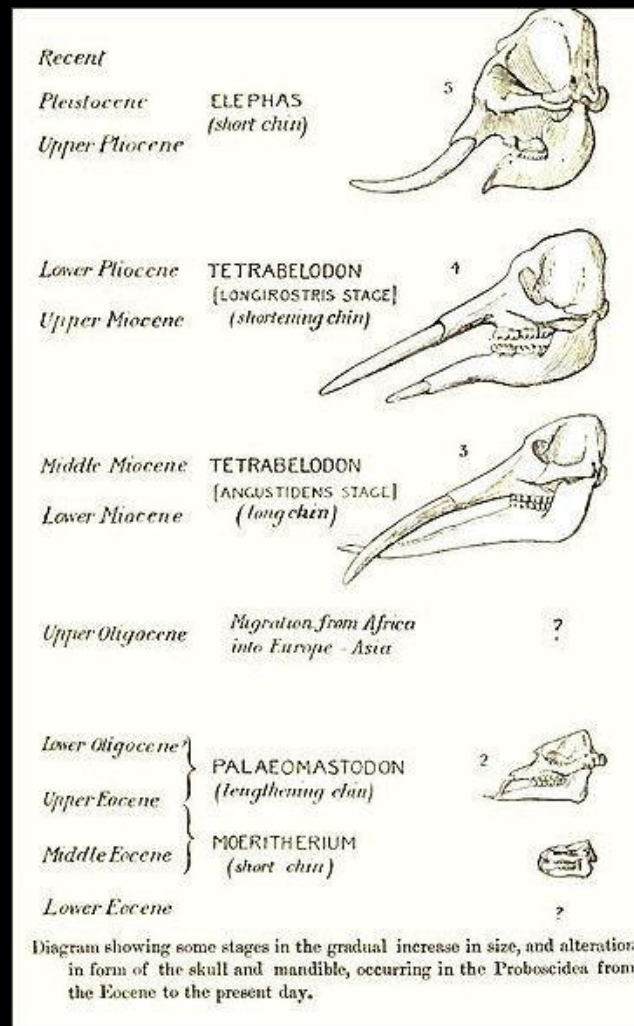




## DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASIAN ELEPHANTS AND AFRICAN ELEPHANTS

African elephants have darker skin, large tusks, a smooth forehead, a dip in their back, five toes on their front feet, large ears that fold backward over the shoulder, and two finger-like protuberances at the tip of their trunk. Both male and females have tusks.

Adult male African elephants weigh up to six tons and stand 11 feet tall at the shoulder, and females weigh as much four tons. Bush elephants live in most countries south of the Saharan and forest elephants live in Cameroon, Congo, Ivory Coast and other central and west African nations. African elephants are more difficult to tame than Asian elephants although some have been trained for circus and as mounts for tourists in southern Africa.



## ELEPHANT AGE

On average an Asian elephants lives to be around 40 or 50. Their life cycle closely parallels that of humans. They reach sexual maturity at the age of 11 to 14, reach full growth at around 30, and die around 50 or 60 in captivity (they die sooner in the wild which is a less forgiving environment for old elephants). Scientists measure their age by measuring the size of their footprints.

The oldest verified age of a mammal other than human is 78 years, by a female Asian elephant that died in a zoo in Santa Clara, California in July 1975. Whales are believed to live longer but it is difficult to verify their age



## ELEPHANT AGE

Interestingly the number heartbeats on the life of an elephant is approximately equal to the number heartbeats on the life of a shrew. An elephant's heart beats about 20 times a minute while the heart of a shrew, which lives only one or two years, is around 600 beats a second.

Elephants live longer in wild than zoos according to a study published in Science in December 2008. Randolph E. Schmid of AP wrote: “Researchers compared the life spans of elephants in European zoos with those living in Amboseli National Park in Kenya and others working on a timber enterprise in Myanmar. Animals in the wild or in natural working conditions had life spans twice that or more of their relatives in zoos. [Source: Randolph E. Schmid, AP, December 11, 2008]





## ELEPHANT CHARACTERISTICS

A running elephant reach speeds of 25 miles per hour (compared to 70 mph for a cheetah and 27.9 mph for the world's fastest human). A charging elephant can reportedly maintain a 35 miles per hour pace for 120 yards.

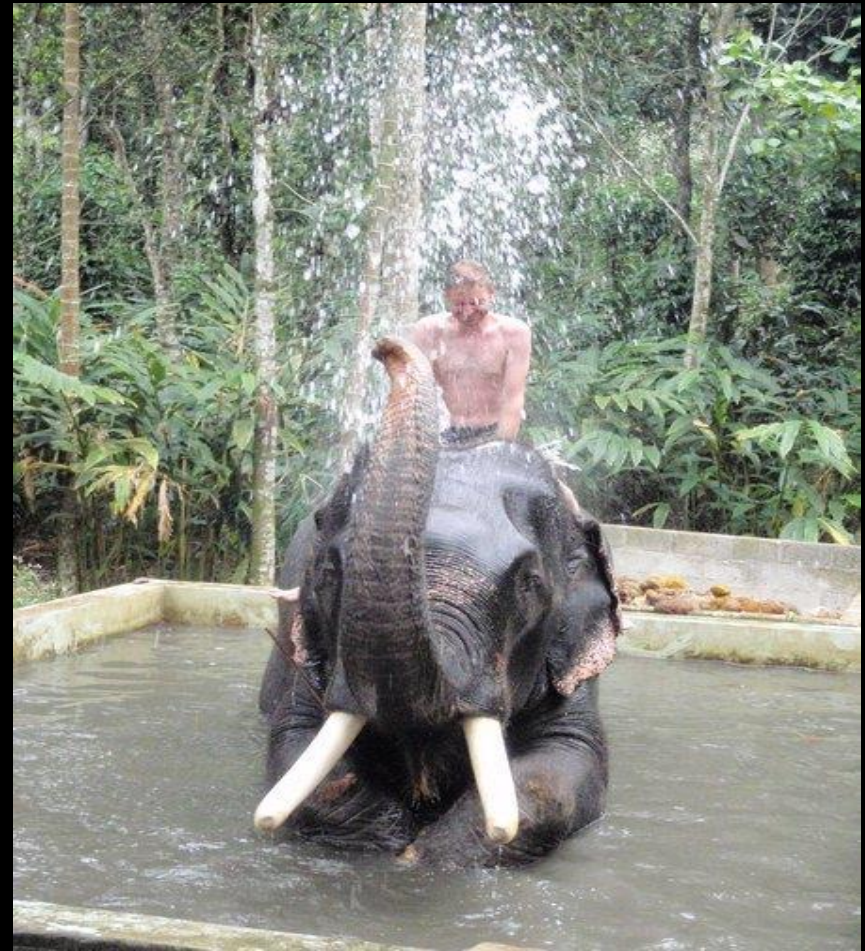
A trotting elephant can maintain speeds exceeding 18 miles-per-hour for more than a kilometer. Elephants move 15 to 20 miles a day. The movement keeps their nails trimmed. Captive animals have to have their nails filed.



## ELEPHANT CHARACTERISTICS

Elephants have wrinkled inch-thick skin but lack sweat glands. To keep cool elephants they flap their well veined ears and seek water for relief.

When severely overheated elephants may draw water from their throats or stomachs and spray their ears..



## ELEPHANTS IN ANTIQUITY

elephants play a major role in our world today, except it is in an extremely negative light. The ivory trade is slowly eradicating the elephant population, and there is very little that can be done to stop it. Although a ban was enforced by CITES in 1989, the market for illegal ivory continues to thrive.

In China, certain shops are given special permission to sell ivory goods with the right documents, however, these documents are easy to forge. From 2011 to 2012, more than 50,000 elephants were killed on the African continent. This crisis is significant not only to environmentalists, but also to the tribes and people to whom these animals are sacred. In the past decade or so, more than 13,000 people have lost their lives trying to protect elephants in Kenya alone. Traders like Victor Gordon and the work they do are threatening to completely erase the presence of elephants in the world, destroying centuries of history and culture.

## ELEPHANTS IN ANTIQUITY

Ever since the initial, military use of elephants by King Porus, the taming of elephants has become widely accepted as a doctrine of Indian culture. They were used for logging, transport, and served as entertainment at royal functions.

In India, the Asian Elephant is the living embodiment of Ganesha, the Hindu god of wisdom and prosperity and patron of the arts and sciences. Ganesha's physical appearance is significant because the Hindu people believe that he represents the unity of the Small Being, or the man, with the Great Being, or the elephant; the union of the individual soul with the divine.





## MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION

The following elephants or elephant-like figures occur in mythology and religion:

Airavata, elephant ridden by the Hindu god Indra

Erawan, Thai version of Airavata

Ganesh, elephant-headed Hindu deity

Malini, elephant-headed goddess associated with the birth of Ganesha

Vinayaki, elephant-headed Hindu goddess





## AIRAVATA

Airavata (Sanskrit: ऐरावत "belonging to Iravati") is a white elephant who carries the Hindu god Indra. It is also called 'abhra-Matanga', meaning "elephant of the clouds"; 'Naga-malla', meaning "the fighting elephant"; and 'Arkasodara', meaning "brother of the sun".

'Abhramu' is the elephant wife of Airaavatha is also the third son of Kashyap and Kadru. In the Mahabharata he is listed as a great serpent.



## GANESHA

Ganesha (Sanskrit: गणेश, IAST: Gaṇeśa; [About this soundlisten \(help·info\)](#)), also known as Ganapati, Vinayaka, or by numerous other names, is one of the best-known and most worshipped deities in the Hindu pantheon. His image is found throughout India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Thailand, Mauritius, Bali (Indonesia) and Bangladesh. Hindu denominations worship him regardless of affiliations. Devotion to Ganesha is widely diffused and extends to Jains and Buddhists.





## VINAYAKI

Vināyakī is an elephant-headed Hindu goddess. Her mythology and iconography are not clearly defined. Little is told about her in Hindu scriptures and very few images of this deity exist.

Due to her elephantine features, the goddess is generally associated with the elephant-headed god of wisdom, Ganesha. She does not have a consistent name and is known by various names — Stri Ganesha ("female Ganesha."), Vainayaki, Gajananā ("elephant-faced"), Vighneshvari ("Mistress of obstacles") and Ganeshani, all of them being feminine forms of Ganesha's epithets Vinayaka, Gajanana, Vighneshvara and Ganesha itself. These identifications have resulted in her being assumed as the shakti — feminine form of Ganesha.



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