

Discovered! Elephants call each other by name

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Intelligence: Elephants may also have deep social bonds, complex thoughts, and a desire to connect with others.

Should they have human rights? Scientists have found that elephants have more in common with us than anyone imagined. Some think it should change how we understand animals.

What's happening?

The mother elephant looked annoyed. The herd is about to set off for the next waterhole, but her son is nowhere to be seen. Typical! All she can do is call his name: "Kala Nag!"

This is just a story. But according to a new study by scientists, it may not be far from reality.

Find out more

Researchers used AI to analyse over 400 calls between elephants in Kenya.

The AI system picked out sounds that could have been names. The scientists then played these back to the elephants they believed they belonged to. They wanted to see whether the elephants would react — and they did, "energetically".

Until now, we have not known about any other animal other than humans that talk to each other with names.

The discovery is very important. If elephants are clever enough to learn each other's names, they may be able to think in a similar way to us.

Four years ago a champion of animal rights, Steven Wise, took a zoo in New York to court. He argued that an elephant called Happy should be moved to a sanctuary. He wanted the law to see her as a person.

Wise lost. But the judge agreed that Happy was a very "intelligent being". Meanwhile, last year, a survey found that a third of Americans believed that animals should have the same rights as humans.

Should they have **human rights**?

Some say

Yes! Elephants are a lot like us. They have big brains and can remember things. They also **grieve** when other elephants die. They should have rights just like us.

Others think

No! Humans are clearly different to all other animals. We should treat animals with kindness, but we should not treat them just like people.

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - What words do you think of when you hear the word "elephant"?

Some people say

"Nature's great masterpiece, an elephant: the only harmless great thing."

John Donne (1572 – 1631), English poet

What do you think?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: How big do elephants grow? How long do they live?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain about this story and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Do you think all elephants should be set free from zoos? Why or why not?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Which animal would you most like to talk to? Take it in turns to say.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine you overhear two elephants talking to each other. Write a story about it.

Glossary

Herd - A group of animals.

AI - A computer programme that has been designed to think.

Analyse - To study something in detail to work out its meaning.

Kenya - A country in East Africa with a population of nearly 54 million people.

Court - A place where matters of the law are decided by judges or juries.

Intelligent - Having a great ability to reason and understand things.

Survey - When you ask a group of people questions about what they think about a particular topic.

Human rights - The basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life. Some have called for animals and even natural phenomena like rivers to have some form of human rights.

Grieve - Feel sad about the death of someone you cared about.