

The Elephants of Sri Lanka



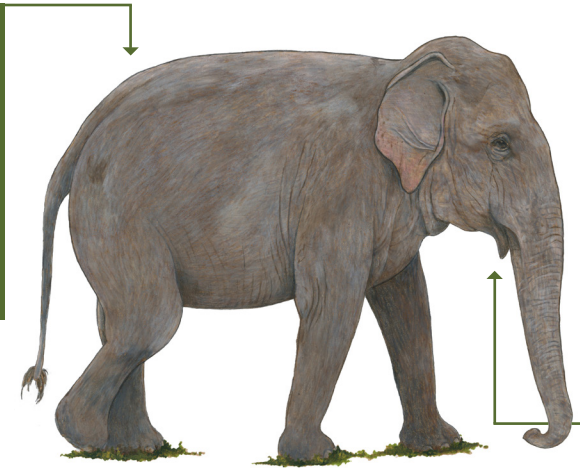
Ayubowan, and welcome to Sri Lanka! Asian elephants are iconic on the island, and as intelligent, social, long-lived animals, they share a lot in common with people. Elephants are also an incredibly important part of Sri Lanka's landscapes. As you journey through the park today, be sure to respectfully enjoy elephants and the other wildlife that live alongside them.

Asian Elephant Society

Elephant society centers around females. **Female elephants** (called "cows") live in smaller groups comprised of female relatives and their young offspring called "calves." These female groups often join together and split throughout the day and across the seasons in a process called **fission-fusion**. As you drive through the park, watch for the tight bonds that elephant mothers and their calves share with each other. Like humans, young elephants depend on their mothers and other family members for many years. After going through puberty, **male elephants** (called "bulls") leave the family groups in which they were born when they become too rambunctious for the females. Young adult males often form loose associations with other young males, while older males tend to be solitary. Male elephants spend the rest of their lives socializing with each other and wandering between female groups as they seek food, water, and mating opportunities.

Female

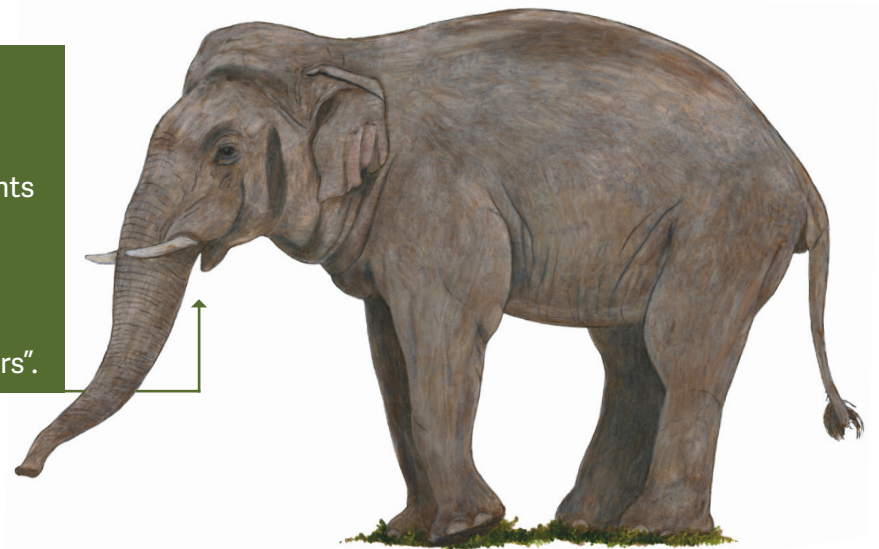
After giving birth, the pelvis of a female forms a square-shaped backside.



Female Asian elephants do not have tusks, but they may have smaller "tushes" that do not extend far beyond the lip.

Male

Only some male elephants in Sri Lanka have tusks. Males with tusks are called "tuskers".



Get to Know Elephants as Individuals

Individual elephants are unique with their own personalities and motivations, just like people. To understand how individual elephants interact with each other and their environment, researchers use physical features to distinguish elephants from each other and identify them. This is important for tracking individuals over time. Here are some examples of the features you can use to begin to know the elephants you observe today.

Ears



Tails



Tusks



Be Elephant Friendly

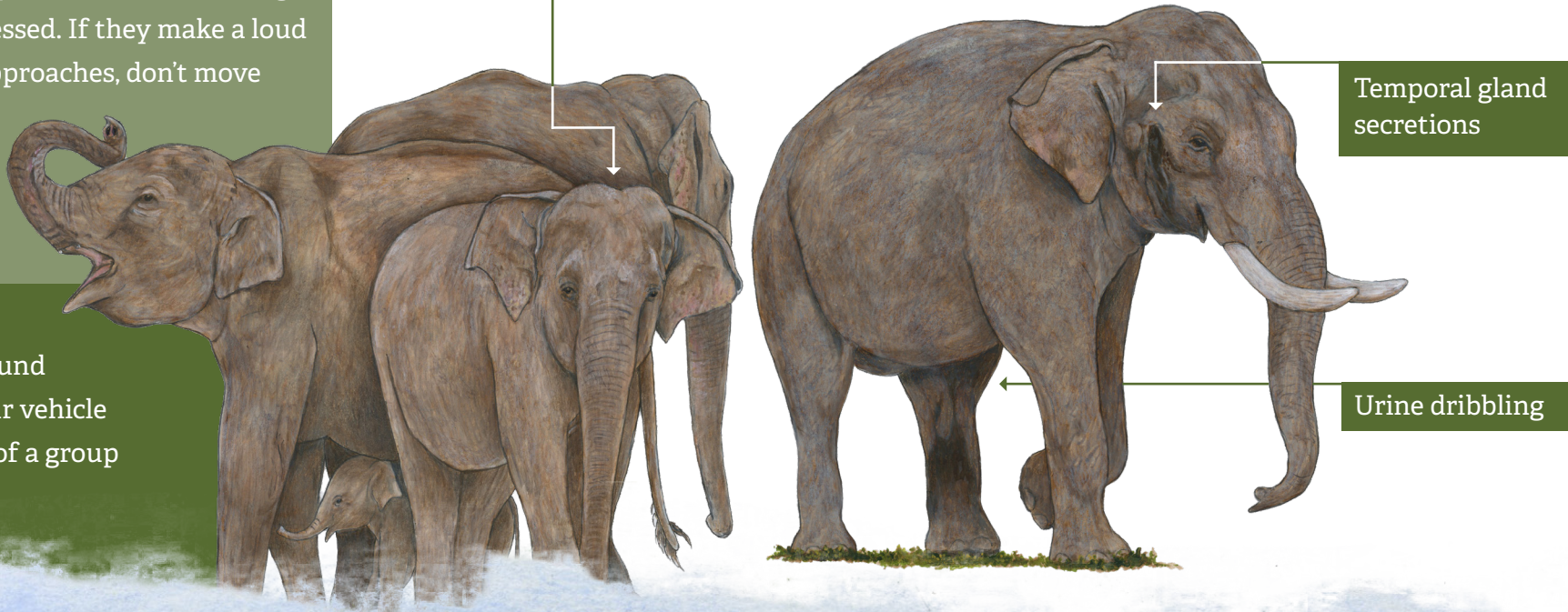
Elephants in Sri Lanka live among human-dominated environments, even here in the park. Even so, the way we behave as we travel through the park affects the daily lives of elephants. We encourage you to use the information below to learn how to be elephant friendly while you are in the vehicle.

Elephants hold their ears outwards when they are alert and assessing a potential threat. A charging elephant is a clear sign that you are too close and have caused them distress.

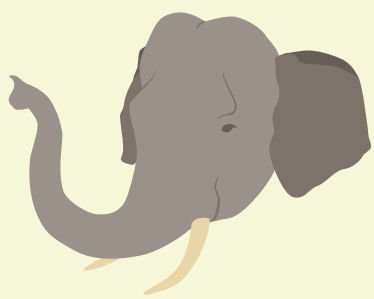
Asian elephants may trumpet or roar as a warning signal when they are distressed. If they make a loud noise when your vehicle approaches, don't move closer until the elephants are relaxed and undisturbed by your vehicle's presence.

When threatened, female elephants form a circle around their calves. Make sure your vehicle doesn't separate members of a group from each other.

Male elephants regularly undergo "musth," a period of heightened reproductive activity. During musth, male elephants can be especially aggressive around people. Give extra space to elephants that are draining from their temporal glands or dribbling urine, clear signs of musth.



When approaching a group of elephants in your vehicle, please keep a distance of at least 10 meters. Use quiet voices when talking to each other, and if possible, turn off your vehicle's engine when you are viewing elephants. Our research has shown that when vehicles are within 10 meters, elephants are more likely to show signs of stress and abandon their normal behavioral patterns. Relaxed elephants will show natural behaviors, including feeding, bathing, and socializing with each other.



The Sri Lanka Elephant Project

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ZOO
+
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The Sri Lanka Elephant Project is a collaborative group of conservationists conducting scientific research to enhance the lives of elephants and the people who live around them. Asian elephants are an endangered species, and our non-invasive work involves studying the demographics, behavior, and health of the elephants to inform their conservation. We also work with local communities to understand the challenges faced by people who live around elephants so that we can help develop sustainable and ethical solutions for human–elephant conflict. We are also proud to be training the next generation of Sri Lankan conservationists.

To learn more, visit us at www.LankaElephants.org