

HEART-RENDING ACCOUNT OF THE DANGERS FACING AFRICA'S ELEPHANTS

THE LAST ELEPHANTS

COMPILED BY

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AND COLIN BELL

Struik Nature
(Foreword by

HRH Prince William,
Duke of Cambridge)

Review: Orielle Berry



DID you know that in Africa there's one elephant for every 20,000 people; fewer than 450,000 according to the (most recent) Great Elephant Census of 2016, down from the 3 to 5 million just 100 years ago?

In this handsomely illustrated book, searingly heart-rending photographs of the carnage of elephants is juxtaposed with vividly evoked pictures of these stately gentle giants.

It brings home the harsh facts: in many of their home ranges, elephant populations have plummeted by a third in just seven years – on average an elephant is killed every 15 to 20 minutes.

Yes, with the shockingly horrific pictures displayed of poached and mangled elephants, the news is out: these intelligent, extraordinary creatures are in crisis.

The book, with comprehensive information, hard facts and figures, and with emotional appeal, presents a powerful message – true to its title – these could be the last elephants and could see their final demise in less than three decades.

The authors, in this superbly compiled book, have gathered together experts from all over Africa.

Their essays present a convincing case to do everything possible to halt the carnage of elephants in the face of greedy and ruthless dealers and consumers.



IVORY burning. | MARTIN MIDDLEBROOK

Pinnock and Bell have travelled throughout the continent and know and love elephants.

In putting together the book, they selected more than 40 experts, from researchers, writers, conservationists, park rangers and even poets, to tell the story of elephants and the great threat they are under.

Through contributors like Dan Wylie, Ian McCallum, Patricia Schonstein, Colin Bell, Garth Thompson, Naftali Honig and others, readers will be enlightened as to how to create a safe haven: will have the link explained between big trees, big elephants and big thinking;



and will be warned of the illegal wildlife trade.

There are chapters about elephants in different regions across the continent from the desert-dwelling pachyderms in Namibia to Niassa's elephants and Zimbabwe's "presidential elephants". But, jarringly, we find out about ivory and terrorism and arms and elephants and the poaching networks.

On a more positive note there are chapters on CITES – is this an organisation that could save the elephants, and are translocation and welfare in conflict? There's even an appendix on how to get involved.

Ian McCallum tellingly informs in the beginning of the book that elephants are more than just a keystone species in their ecosystems. He writes: "They are an indicator species, large grey mirrors of the fate of all other wild creatures."

"If we can't protect an animal this large, how can we be expected to protect the little things?"

James Currie brings home this fact by pointing out: "For elephant society, the loss of large tusks pales in comparison to the loss of the accumulated wisdom that disappears every time a tusk is felled before his natural time."

There are many stories on the dire situation of poaching and how it's so often tied to social and political crises.

Hunting is also an issue. Daniel Dugmore's chilling black-and-white apocalyptic photograph of a hunting camp in Botswana in 2016 documents the two years preceding Botswana's big-game hunting ban – as the authors say, a glimpse into the future should we choose to ignore the ongoing slaughter of these highly emotional and sentient beings.

Like his father, HRH Prince William is an ardent conservationist and writes: "I fear that the African elephant will have disappeared from the wild by the time Princess Charlotte turns 25."

This is a chilling thought. And hopefully this book will create greater awareness of the devastating loss of elephant lives in Africa and stem the tide of poaching and hunting.

It's also a tribute to the many people who work for the welfare of elephants, particularly those who risk their lives for wildlife each day, often for little or no pay – field rangers and the anti-poaching teams; and to the many communities around Africa that have elected to work with elephants, and not against them.