

BOOK REVIEWS

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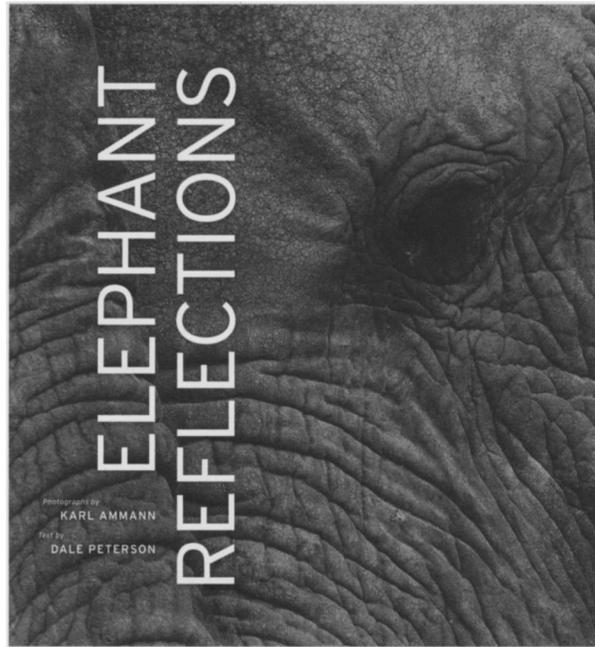
ANIMAL STUDIES

Elephant Reflections. Photographs by Karl Ammann and text by Dale Peterson. 2009. The University of California Press. (ISBN 978-0-520-25377-3). 288 pp. Hardcover. \$39.95.

The book *Elephant Reflections*, with exquisite photographs by Karl Ammann and text by Dale Peterson, is an eloquent book about elephants in Kenya and the Central African Republic. This unique and awesome book will capture the minds of readers as they become familiar with two of the remaining species of elephants – the savanna and forest elephant (the Asian elephant is the third surviving species.) Not only is it a pictorial commentary, but it is a thought-provoking narrative consisting of research, stories, and anecdotes about the behavior of elephants. With breathtaking images, readers are literally taken on a “safari” as they explore the life style of these two species.

Spectacular photographs introduce readers to this unfolding story about elephants. These images are classified into three areas: **themes** – beginning and passages, the opening and closing sets; **subjects** – textures, colors, perspectives, and fragments; and **genres** – portraits, behaviors and associations. A vivid picture is described of a family led by the matriarch moving in a single file foraging for food and water. As it spreads out at the bank of the river, the photographer’s dream comes true as he captures what he refers to as a “family portrait.” Close up and distant photography is used to capture all of the areas listed above and readers are able to visualize many aspects of these mammoth animals in their natural habitat.

Reflections, however, is more than a picturesque account. In the text, readers are given a historical perspective outlining the concerted effort to study elephants after World War II. Prior to this effort, millions had been destroyed, leaving only three surviving species: savanna, forest and Asian. The study began as researchers developed techniques (by trial and error) to first identify and track movements of individuals and families. The author gives a thorough



overview of anatomical structures and their functions unique to these species. Some additional topics explored are family structure, bonding, infrasonic communication, mating, emotions, intelligence and evolution. In addition, factors affecting the survival of the species, such as poaching and destruction of habitats, and efforts by scientists, governmental agencies and interest groups designed to protect these species are noted. Overall, the format provided by the authors allows readers to move from the aesthetic to an abundance of information about the life of this magnificent species. Readers will become enthralled as they learn about the habits and activities of these giants – the largest land mammals.

In the section, *Notes*, a presentation and explanation of nine topics in the text is a plus and serves as a valuable cross reference. The plight and future of these species are described through the eyes of the photographer in the section, *Photographer’s Commentary* and include suggestions for conservation. *Notes on the Photographs* is an excellent reference with captions describing each picture, where the photograph was taken, and the type of photographic equipment used.

Numerous references are listed including Web pages. In the acknowledgment section, the reader is provided not only

with names of individuals and groups, but with details about the role they played in the development of this text which incorporates photographs taken over 25 years. Further, the authors describe how they watched working elephants in Burma, flew with missionaries to photograph forest elephants, documented illegal activity in elephant tusks, observed savanna elephants in East Africa, and obtained comments, papers, and interviews from an elephant expert, geneticist, and others. This section ends with the dedication of the book in memory of a journalist who assisted in this adventure. An index is included, adding to the book’s use as a resource. Jane Goodall stated: *This is a stunning book. It is the best book ever about this most majestic of animals, highlighting the elephant’s intelligence, love of family and delight*

in the good things of life. This is an ideal book for anyone who loves animals, nature and the wonder of creation. This reviewer readily agrees with her statement and highly recommends *Elephant Reflections* to all nature lovers. Facilitators will find this book a valuable resource to compare life processes and structure in mammals. Also, students may be introduced to a variety of careers related to wildlife such as photographers, park rangers, and others. Political and social factors that affect the preservation of these species and the importance of national parks are excellent topics for seminars and symposia.



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