



# Breaking Africa's elephants

Exposing the rise of cruel tourist rides

# Introduction

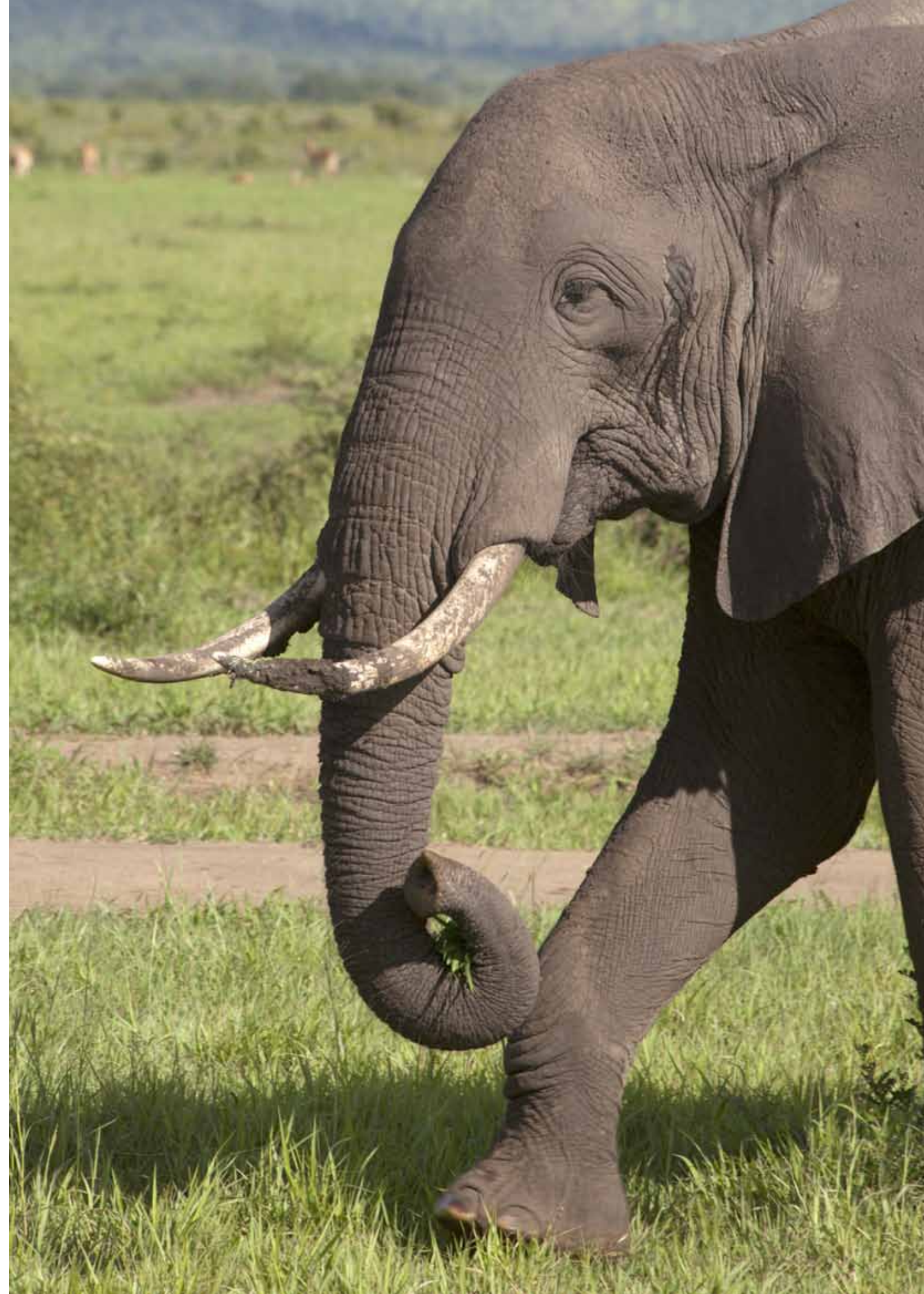
The appalling cruelty inflicted on Asian elephants over decades to meet growing demands from the tourism industry for elephant rides and shows is now spreading throughout southern Africa. If left unchecked hundreds more African elephants will face lifetimes of cruelty and abuse for tourist entertainment.<sup>1</sup>

Most tourists go on elephant rides because they love elephants. They don't know about the intense physical and psychological pain involved. They will not be told that baby elephants are cruelly taken from their mothers, and their spirits harshly broken for training to give rides and perform tricks for tourists.

And after breaking there is no end to their suffering.

Captive elephants used in profit-making entertainment rides can endure horrendous captive conditions for decades. These include chaining and close confinement, loneliness and isolation from other elephants - with whom they would naturally form bonds - and deprivation of food and water.

This report exposes the level of abuse being inflicted on hundreds of these magnificent animals in Southern Africa. It highlights how tourists and tour operators can stop tourist rides in their tracks before it's too late.







# Advancing across Southern Africa

The first commercial venues offering elephant rides in Africa opened in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s, and then began spreading through South Africa in 2001. There are now at least 39 commercial elephant venues, holding at least 215 captive elephants, operating across Southern Africa.

At least 25 of these venues – many known as elephant parks – offer elephant rides. Of these, at least seven also force their captive elephants to do tricks for visiting tourists.

Most parks are in South Africa, where 144 captive elephants are held in at least 28 different venues\*. A further 47 are held in seven elephant parks across Zimbabwe, 13 in two venues in Zambia and 11 elephants in two venues in Botswana.

Elephants at parks in Africa are often used as photo props for tourist selfies or forced to perform tricks, as well as giving rides. Captive elephants are bred for riding or sold to other operations, or to Asian elephant parks.

Twenty-four young elephants were recently sold<sup>2</sup> and exported by the Zimbabwean government to Chimelong Safari Park in China<sup>3</sup>. They are likely to suffer a lifetime of abuse performing in shows and giving rides. At least 50 more elephants in Zimbabwe are in a holding facility and await a similar fate<sup>3</sup>.

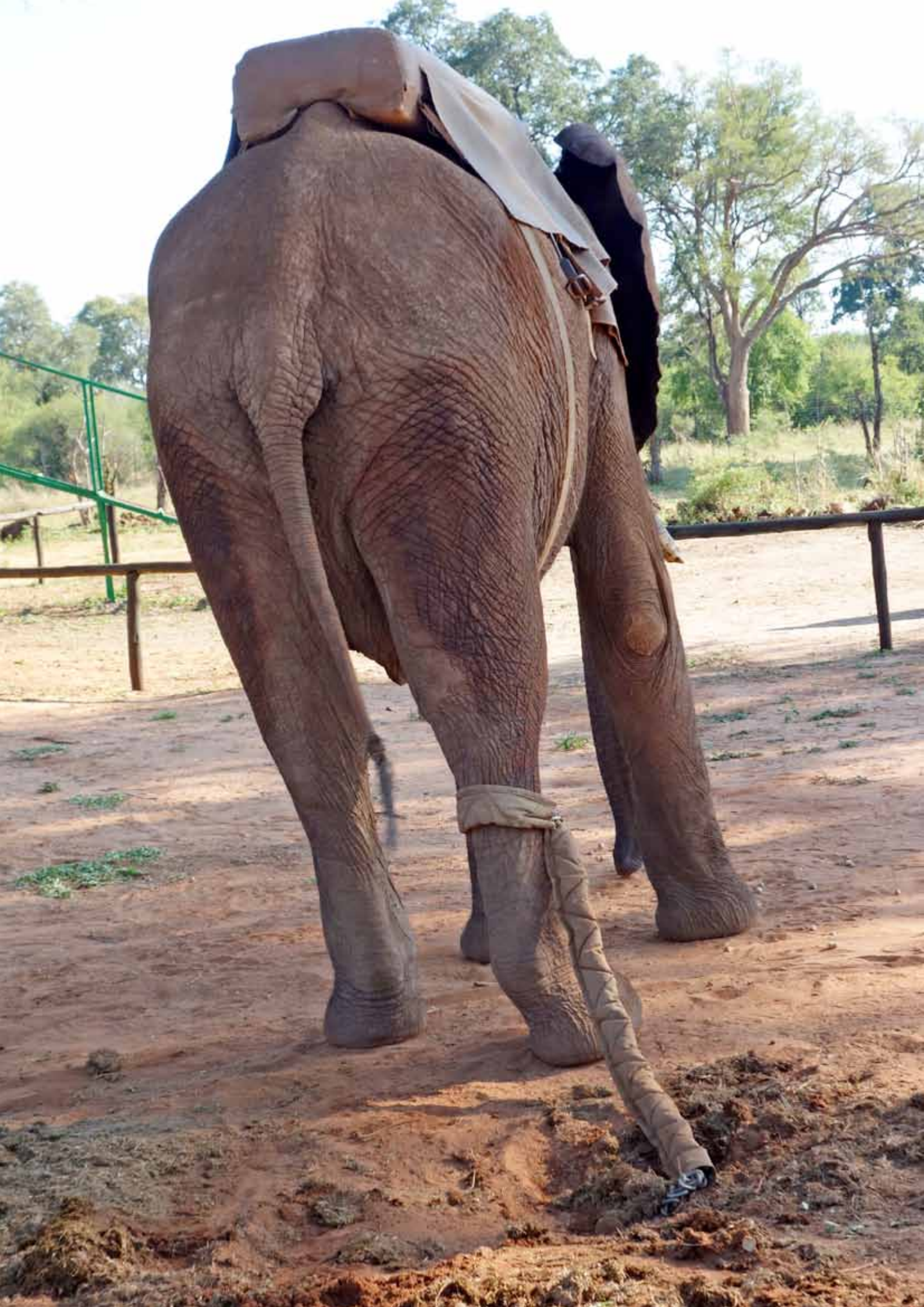
There are currently no known elephant parks in the Southern African countries of Angola, Malawi, Namibia, or Mozambique, and no elephant riding venues in Central,

East, or West Africa. But it is clear that the scale of abuse to elephants and their welfare will get even worse if rides and entertainment are allowed to spread across Africa or intensify within Southern Africa.

We want to stop this happening, before it is too late.

\*Based on 2015 data from World Animal Protection research and the NSPCA<sup>4</sup>





# Breaking wild spirits

No matter whether born in captivity or taken from the wild, elephants used for riding, tricks and selfies will always be wild animals with natural instincts and behaviours<sup>1</sup>. Despite the claims of the African elephant ride industry, all elephants used for entertainment suffer a cruel and intensive breaking-in process. This is so they can be forced to perform and be ridden for tourism entertainment.

The process typically involves tightly restraining them with ropes or chains. This means that the elephant can only move when commanded and has to accept a person riding on their neck. Severe pain is often inflicted with pointed metal bullhooks, wooden battens, and whips.

This 'breaks' the young elephants and traumatises them so much that they fear humans and their pain-giving tools. Bloody wounds are common. Young elephants are isolated and deprived of water and food. This tortuous process can last for weeks.

The great trauma elephants endure during breaking stays with them throughout their lives, and can leave them suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder<sup>5,6</sup>.

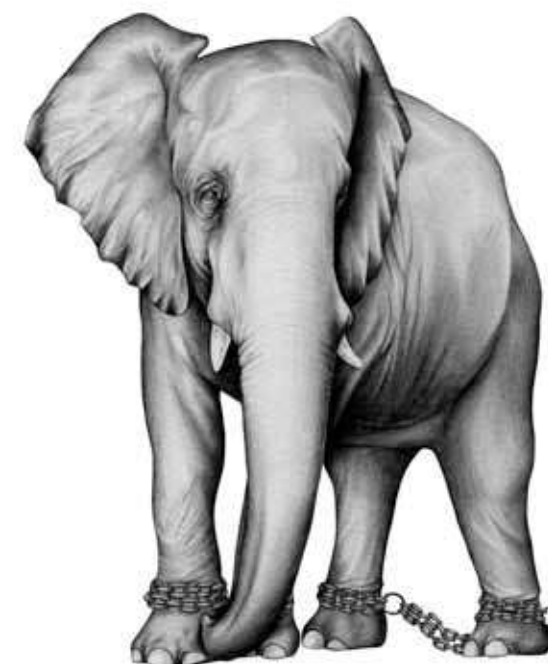
Elephant handlers in Southern Africa have confirmed to us that all young elephants undergo the same breaking process as used in Asia. This is despite the widespread claims of African elephant ride businesses that their elephants are 'trained' through a system of rewards such as molasses pellets.

The suffering of elephants continues after breaking. The confinement of elephant camps means they are unable to form natural social relationships. This and the size of their captive world is hugely damaging to their physical and psychological wellbeing.

Although most captive African elephants will be allowed supervised foraging in the bush for some time in the day, their nights are spent chained in small enclosures.

Captive elephants can never roam freely as they would in the wild.

And because elephants kept in captive situations are typically given little veterinary care, a relatively minor illness can quickly become a big problem, causing unnecessary long-term suffering<sup>7</sup>.







# Highlighting conservation matters

African elephants are currently found in 37 countries across Central, Eastern, Southern and West Africa. Their conservation status, as to whether they are endangered in particular areas or not, varies<sup>8</sup>.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Southern Africa's wild elephant populations were believed to be at their lowest<sup>8</sup>. They have been recovering steadily ever since and the region is now believed to harbour some of the world's largest remaining wild populations<sup>8</sup>.

Despite this, wild African elephants are still heavily targeted by poachers for their ivory, and habitat loss is causing their distribution to become increasingly fragmented across the continent. In some regions, experts believe increasing human populations and resource competition will prevent wild elephant populations from ever reaching their original numbers.

# Increasing commercial cruelty

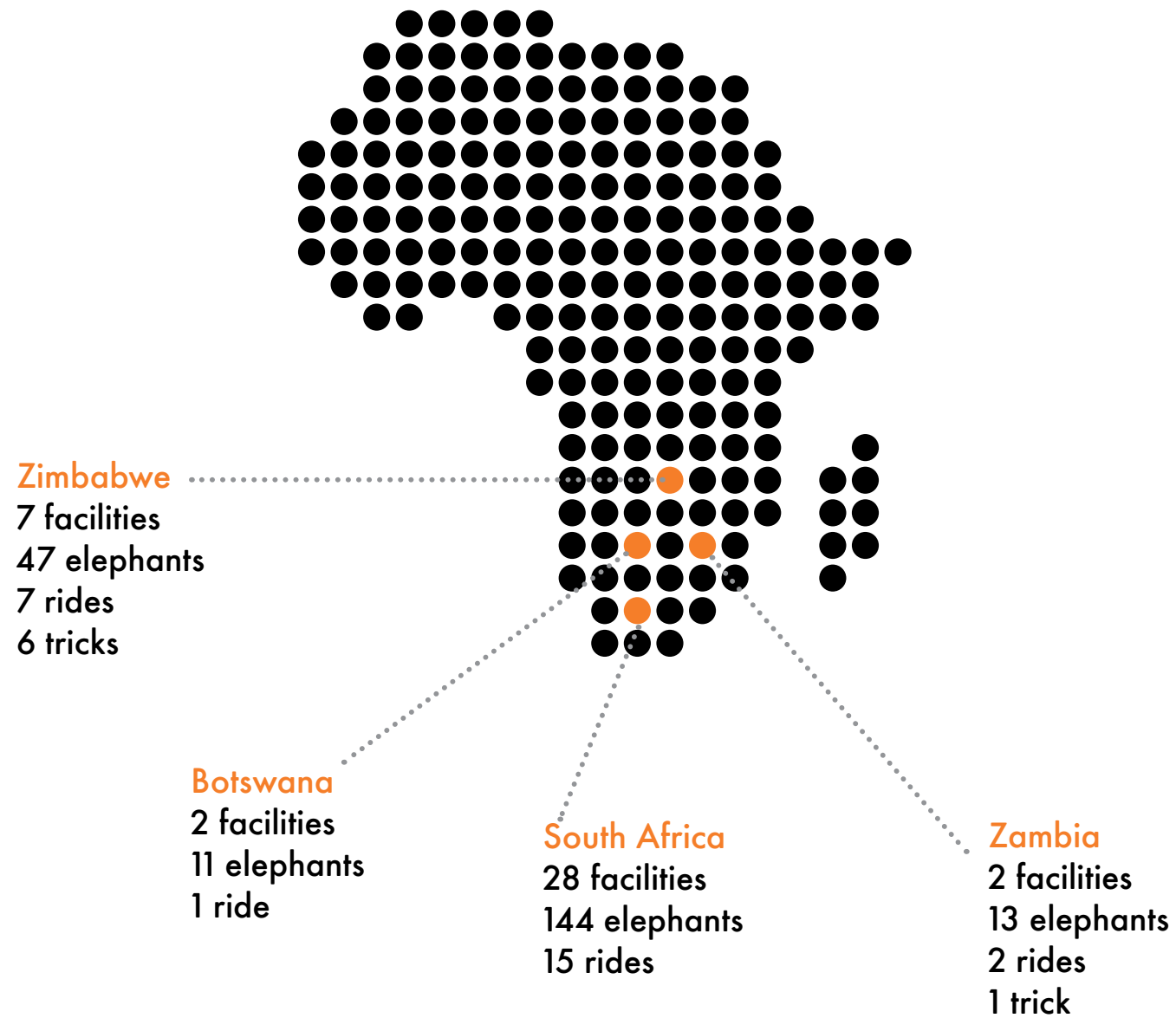


Young elephants can be sold for as much to \$60,000<sup>9</sup>. This is driven by the tourism industry's growing demands and has led to poaching for the tourism industry and of breeding captive elephants for profit. Consequently, wild populations may be put under even more strain and efforts to conserve the species hindered.

And unlike responsible captive conservation programmes, commercial venues using elephants for entertainment do not help to boost wild populations. This is because their elephants are extremely difficult and costly to be responsibly and safely released into the wild<sup>10</sup>.



## Commercial elephant venues in Southern Africas

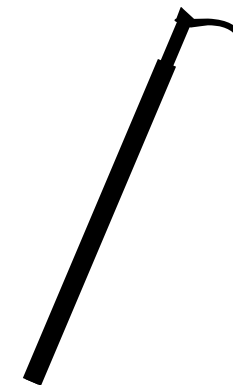


Country	Number of facilities	Reported numbers of elephants (ie website)	Rides	Tricks
South Africa	28	144	15	0
Zambia	2	13	2	1
Zimbabwe	7	47	7	6
Bostwana	2	11	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>

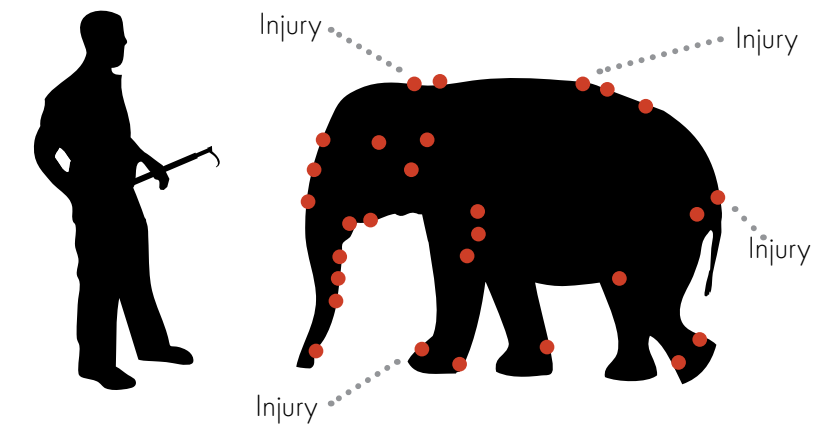
Table based on 2015 data from World Animal Protection research and the NSPCA<sup>3</sup>



**Breaking an elephant takes no more than a week**  
The trauma the elephant feels after being broken can last a lifetime.



A bullhook is used to inflict pain to 'teach' an elephant to do tricks.



The trainer uses the bullhook to extend their reach to sensitive areas of the elephant when giving commands\*.

\*<http://www.all-creatures.org/articles/ar-bullhooks.html>



# Developing elephant-friendly tourism

When carried out ethically, tourism can bring in vital income for local communities, national economies and can help protect wild animals like elephants.

In South Africa alone, there is a network of 400 protected land areas<sup>11</sup>. Many have wild elephants that tourists can observe in their natural habitat.

Ethical wildlife tourists can help end the unnecessary suffering of elephants by refusing to visit the parks that offer rides, shows and tricks. Instead they can choose to see elephants in wild protected areas.

Genuine elephant sanctuaries, such as the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, have animal welfare at the core of what they do. They will not use elephants in performances for tourists or allow the elephants to be ridden. Genuine sanctuaries show that neither cruelty nor harsh treatment are ever needed to manage the elephants in their care.

All tourist attractions that breed elephants for commercial purposes and promote direct contact with elephants, including rides, shows or tricks, should be avoided.

# 400

**The number of networks of protected land areas. Many have wild elephants which tourists can observe in their natural habitat.**



# Tour operator pledge

## Tour operators can stop African elephant suffering

The tourism industry must be part of the solution to end the abuse and enable tourists to see elephants in the wild.

**We are meeting with tour operators** around the world. We want to make sure they're aware of the cruelty and abuse involved in elephant rides and shows and be more accountable for where they send their customers. We've asked them to stop selling or promoting elephant rides and shows, and to sign our 'Elephant-friendly Tourist Pledge'.

So far, more than 20 travel companies, including TUI Nederland, Intrepid Travel, Apollo, Albatros Travel and World Expeditions have agreed to stop offering and promoting elephant rides or shows. We are calling on all operators to make the tourism industry part of the solution to keep wild animals wild.

## Elephant-friendly tourism pledge

### [Company name]

- Acknowledges that tourists want to experience wild animals, but often don't realise that wild animals suffer hidden cruelty in order to perform and interact with people.
- Recognises that elephants in tourist venues are often sourced from the wild, representing an animal welfare and conservation concern.
- Understands that elephants used for entertainment purposes have to undergo a cruel breaking-in process, harsh training, are forced to act unnaturally, and suffer throughout their lives in captivity.

### And therefore:

- Commits not to sell, offer or promote venues or activities involving elephant rides and shows. Instead, if offering elephant experiences, commits to offer only those with a high standard of elephant welfare and conservation, with responsible viewing of elephants in wild or semi-wild habitats.
- Commits to proactively communicate this commitment to protect elephants to customers, to encourage elephant-friendly tourism.

Signed by

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Date

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# Join the movement

## Tourists can stop African elephant rides in their tracks

Most tourists sign up for experiences with elephants because they love wild animals and don't know about the cruelty behind the rides, tricks and photo opportunities. We know that if most people did, they wouldn't do it.

**We want tourists** to understand that the best place to see an elephant in Africa is responsibly in the wild or, in the next best place, a genuine elephant sanctuary.

**We want tourists** to know that any African venue offering elephant rides or shows is thinking about its profits and not the welfare of the elephants involved. No matter what they say - they are abusing elephants and doing nothing to help conservation.

**We want people** to sign up to our Wildlife. Not Entertainers campaign and stop the cruelty now.



► [worldanimalprotection.org/wildlife-not-entertainers](http://worldanimalprotection.org/wildlife-not-entertainers)

## Wildlife. Not Entertainers

Our campaign Wildlife. Not Entertainers is building a worldwide movement of wildlife protectors to stop wild animals being used for entertainment.

We have a long history of campaigning to stop such abuse, including ending bear dancing in India, Turkey and Greece through our work with local partners and government officials.



# Understanding African elephants

The African elephant is the Earth's largest terrestrial mammal<sup>12</sup>. Males can weigh up to

**6,000 kg**

and measure up to

**3.3 meters**

at the shoulder<sup>12</sup>.

Elephants are highly intelligent, emotional and social animals<sup>12</sup>. They have complex multi-tiered social systems, close family bonds and show empathy<sup>12,13</sup>. Females live in strongly-bonded matriarchal herds and care for their young together<sup>12</sup>.

Adult males are more independent and have fewer social bonds<sup>12</sup>. They tend to roam alone or in small groups, visiting and joining matriarchal groups temporarily<sup>12</sup>.

There are two recognised species of African elephant: the Savannah elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the Forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*)<sup>8</sup>.

African elephants occur in 37 sub-Saharan countries. But their distribution varies considerably<sup>14</sup> with many populations existing in small, fragmented pockets<sup>15</sup>.

African elephants were once found nearly all over the African continent<sup>12</sup>. Today, because of poaching, habitat loss, and human-elephant conflict, their range and numbers have drastically decreased<sup>12</sup>.

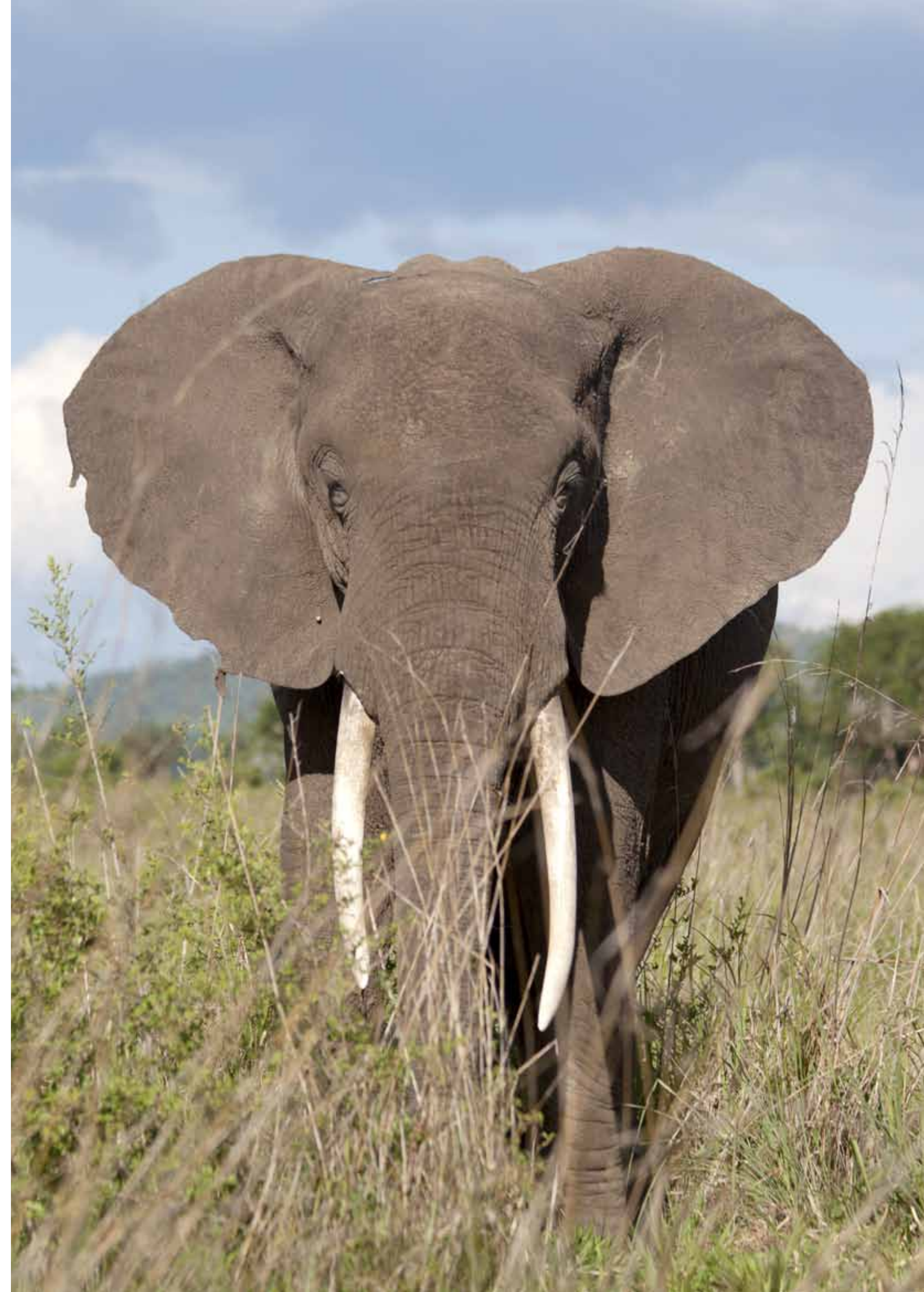
In 2006 – the most recent data available – the African elephant population was estimated to be at least

**472,269**

individuals.

**58%**

were found in Southern Africa<sup>14</sup>.





## Appendix 1

### Table of Commercial Elephant Venues in Southern Africa

No.	Country	Facility	Location	Reported No. of elephants (i.e. website)	Rides	Tricks
1	South Africa	Addo Elephant Back Safaris	Eastern Cape/Addo/Paterson	3	1	?
2	South Africa	Adventures with Elephants	Zebula/Bela Bela	5	1	?
3	South Africa	Botlierskop Private Game Reserve	Botlierskop/Mossel Bay/Klein Brak	4	1	?
4	South Africa	Camp Jabulani	Hoedspruit	18	1	?
5	South Africa	Elephant Sanctuary	Plettenberg Bay	5	1	?
6	South Africa	Elephant Sanctuary	Hazyview, Mpumalanga	2	1	?
7	South Africa	Elephant Sanctuary	Harbeespoortdam	4	1	?
8	South Africa	Elephant Whispers	Mpumalanga	6	1	?
9	South Africa	Kapama Private Game Reserve	Hoedspruit	14	1	?
10	South Africa	Knysna Elephant Park	Knysna	18	1	?
11	South Africa	Kwa Madwala Private Game Reserve	Hectorspruit	2	1	?
12	South Africa	Kwantu Elephant Sanctuary	Paterson	4	1	?
13	South Africa	Pilanesberg Elephant Back Safaris	Pilanesberg	7	0	?
14	South Africa	Shambala Private Reserve/Waterberg Elephant Back Safaris	Waterberg, Vaalwater	10	1	?
15	South Africa	Buffelsdrift Game Lodge	Oudtshoorn	3	1	?
16	South Africa	Aquila Safari	Touws River	2	0	?
17	South Africa	Bayete Zulu Game Lodge	Mkuze/KwaZulu Natal	3	0	?
18	South Africa	Fairy Glen Game Reserve	Worcester	2	0	?
19	South Africa	Garden Route Game Lodge	Albertinia	2	0	?
20	South Africa	Glen Afric Country Lodge	Broederstroom	3	0	?
21	South Africa	Indalu Elephant Safaris	Mossel Bay/Western Cape	6	0	?
22	South Africa	Inverdoorn Game Reserve	Western Cape	2	0	?
23	South Africa	Johannesburg Zoo	Gauteng	2	0	?
24	South Africa	Pretoria Zoo	Gauteng	3	0	?
25	South Africa	Plumari Askari Game Lodge/Magaliesberg	Gauteng	2	0	?
27	South Africa	Natal Zoo	KwaZulu Natal	9	0	?
28	South Africa	Inkwenkwezi Private Game Reserve	East London	3	1	?
				<b>144</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>
29	Zambia	Mukuni Big 5	Livingstone	6	1	1
30	Zambia	Zambezi Elephant Trails	Livingstone	7	1	?
				<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
31	Zimbabwe	Adventure Zone	Victoria Falls	2	1	1
32	Zimbabwe	Antelope Park	Gweru	4	1	1
33	Zimbabwe	Pamuzimba Private Game Reserve	Dunhuramabo	3	1	1
34	Zimbabwe	Shearwater Elephant Back Safaris	Victoria Falls	12	1	1
35	Zimbabwe	The Elephant Experience	Victoria Falls	4	1	1
36	Zimbabwe	Wild Horizons Elephant Sanctuary	Victoria Falls	17	1	1
37	Zimbabwe	Sable Lodge	Imire	5	1	?
				<b>47</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
38	Botswana	Abu Camp	Okavango	8	1	?
39	Botswana	Stanley's Elephant Sanctuary	Okavango	3	0	?
				<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
				<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>215</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>7</b>

Table based on 2015 data from World Animal Protection research and the NSPCA<sup>3</sup>



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## Additional notes

**Central Africa** = (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea).

**Southern Africa** = (Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe).

**Eastern Africa** = (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda).

**West Africa** = (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo).