

Morning Colleagues,

Sad news indeed. Yesterday around 16:00 I received a call from "Wild Dog Student" Mariaan Venter reporting a dead elephant near the Mopani T-junction. I responded and upon my arrival, I found this elephant laying beside a game path a mere 8m from the tarred surface and from the size of the tusks immediately realised that it must be Alexander. Closer inspection confirmed this and all I can say is that his death must have been instantaneous. The carcass lay on its left side beside the game trail with the feet still on it and not a single scrape mark indicating death throes or suffering. There were just two marks where the lower tusk hit the ground, bounced once and came to rest. Upon touching the eye to ascertain death before I became too comfortable, I observed to Mariaan that the eye is still shiny.

What makes this sad incident very interesting and rather unique is that a woman from one of the fast gathering cars asked me "Is he sleeping?" "No Ma'am, else I wouldn't be standing here!" "But we passed here just a while ago and he was still alive!" "No Ma'am must have been another elephant close by". "But he had big teeth just like this one, I've got the pictures right here on my camera!" I went over to look at photos that showed date and time in the frame as well and to my astonishment, there was Alexander standing up hale and hearty while the time on the camera indicated that he was still alive 45min earlier! This must surely be the closest pin-pointing of time of natural death of an elephant as we have ever had before in the KNP?

By these outward signs, I naturally suspect that Alexander's death was caused by a "heart attack" as brought about by EMC. Starting with Dewald Keet, I immediately tried to call a Vet to hear if they wanted to use this opportunity to do a post mortem on this extremely fresh carcass, but as luck would have it Dewald found himself in Phalaborwa and none of the other four was available on their cells right then. Later Roy Bengis and Markus Hoffmeyr did come back to me though and we arranged that I would go and at least collect samples of heart and lung tissue for them.

*Regards,
Johann*

(E-mail from Johann Oelofse reporting the death of Alexander, 8/2/2009)

Hi Johan

Many thanks for this. It sounds like a classic case of EMC! Kruger must be running rather short of tuskers now!

Will you get his estimated age? I can forward you the ageing scheme if you need it. I have forwarded your email to Prof Stuart Saunders after whom the elephant was named.

*Best wishes
Ian*

(E-mail response from former Large Mammal Scientist Dr Ian Whyte, 9/2/2009)

addo elephant
agulhas
augrabies falls
bontebok
golden gate highlands
karoo
kgalagadi transfrontier
knysna lake area
kruger
mapungubwe
marakele
mountain zebra
namaqua
table mountain
tankwa-karoo
tsitsikamma
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vaalbos
west coast
wilderness