

## Behavioral Characteristics of Sri Lankan Elephants

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### ABSTRACT

Two species of elephants are traditionally recognized, the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*). The Asian Elephant (also recognized as the Indian Elephant) is a large land animal (smaller than the African Elephant) that lives in India, Malaysia, Sumatra, and Sri Lanka. This elephant is used extensively for labor; very few are left in the wild. Their life span is about 70 years. Classification of animals shows that the Sri Lankan elephants belong to Kingdom Animalia (animals), Phylum Chordata, Class Mammalia (mammals), Order Proboscidea, Family Elephantidae, Genus *Elephas*, Species *E. maximus*.

Herds of elephants live in tight matriarchal family groups consisting of related females. A herd is led by the oldest and often largest female in the herd, called a matriarch. A herd would consist of 6-100 individuals depending on territory, environment suitability and family size. Compared to other mammals, elephants show signs of grief, joy, anger and have fun. They are extremely intelligent animals and have memories that would span many years. It is this memory that serves matriarchs well during dry seasons when they need to guide their herds, sometimes for tens of miles to watering holes that they remember from the past. Mating Season of the elephants is mostly during the rainy season and the gestation period is 22 months. At birth a calf (twins rare) weighs between 90 - 110 kg. As a calf's trunk at birth has no muscle quality it suckles with its mouth. It takes several months for a calf to gain full control of its trunk.

The encroachment of habitats is one of the foremost threats facing elephants in Sri Lanka. Many climate change projections indicate that key portions of elephants' habitat will become significantly hotter and drier, resulting in poorer foraging conditions, directly threatening calf survival. Increasing conflict with human population and poaching for ivory is additional threats that place the Sri Lankan elephant's future at great risk.

**Keywords:** *Sri Lankan elephants, Behavioral characteristics, Matriarchal family, foremost threats, Future risk*

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