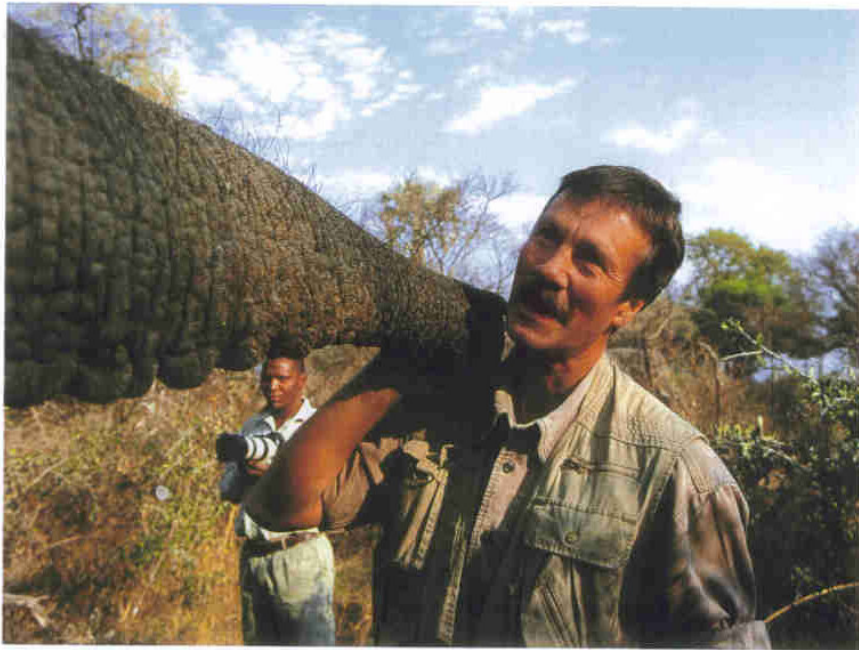


A herd of elephants is shown in a savanna forest. The elephants are in the foreground, with some having their trunks raised. The background is filled with tall, thin trees with dense green foliage. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting a bright day. The overall scene is peaceful and captures the natural behavior of the elephants in their habitat.

# Herd instinct

TV NATURALIST **JONATHAN SCOTT**  
FILMS ELEPHANTS IN KENYA. PICTURES  
BY **JONATHAN AND ANGIE SCOTT**



**IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BE** a member of an elephant herd: to have another elephant gently reach out with that remarkable prehensile trunk and wrap it around your head in greeting; to be able to walk alongside 30 elephants as they go about their daily business of eating, eating, eating; to listen to some of the incredibly expressive sounds they make as they communicate their feelings to one another.

That is exactly what I have been doing for the past year while making a new television series called *Elephant Diaries*. This meant leav-

in Nairobi National Park, before being released into Tsavo East National Park.

I had known about this project since I first came to Kenya 30 years ago, and must admit that I was initially somewhat ambivalent about the idea of humans acting as surrogate mothers to baby elephants: were there not enough elephants in the wild to do the job? But what I also knew was that Daphne Sheldrick – widow of David, the legendary senior warden of Tsavo East – had had remarkable success in raising baby elephants and is one of the most dedicated people currently working in the field of con-

## Baby elephants are irresistible – funny, naughty, playful and joyful – quite capable of showing the emotions that we like to think are our private preserve

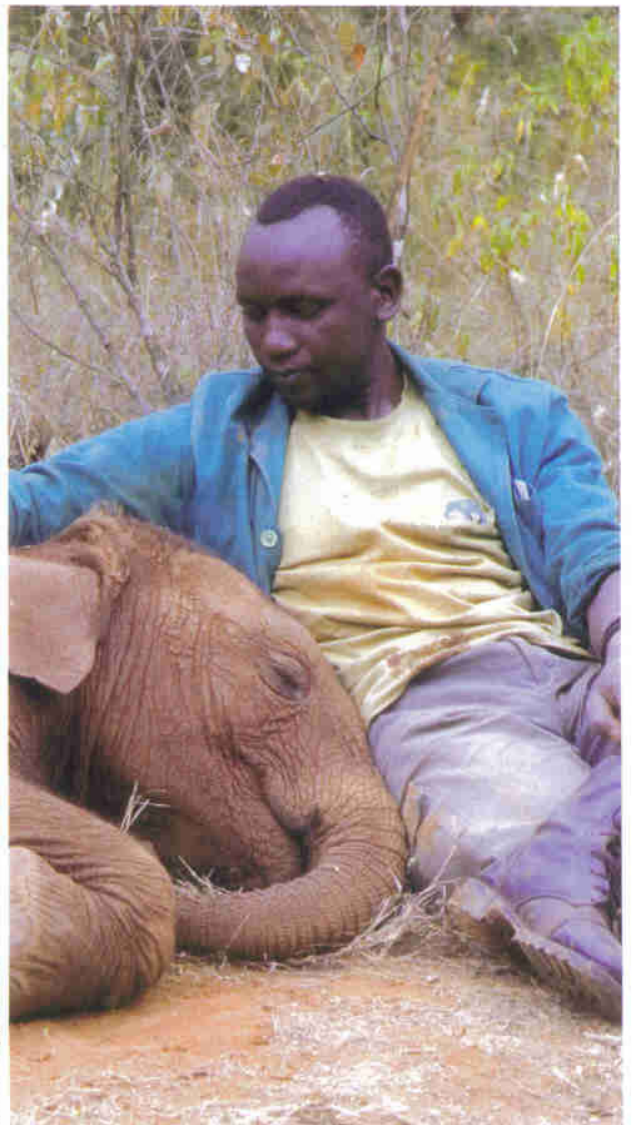
ing the lush green pastures of Kenya's Masai Mara, and exploring the vast wilderness known as Tsavo National Park, which sprawls either side of the main road halfway between Nairobi and Mombasa.

Tsavo gained worldwide notoriety in the late 1890s when two man-eating lions took to preying on construction workers who were building the railway line from Mombassa to Uganda. The lions were immortalised in the bestselling book *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*.

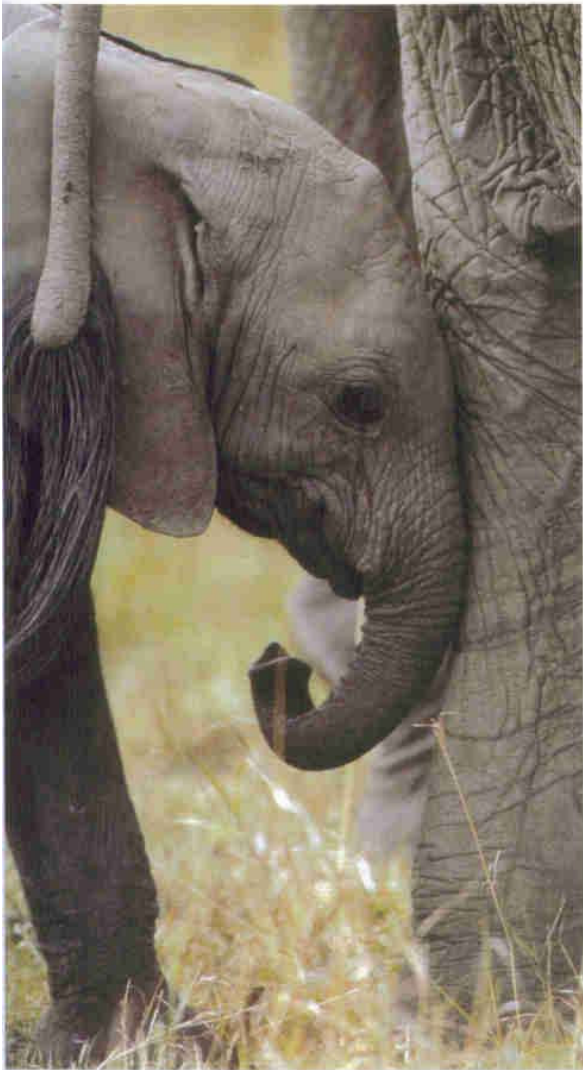
But my brief was not to find man-eating lions. We had come to film the story of elephants that had been brought to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's elephant orphanage,

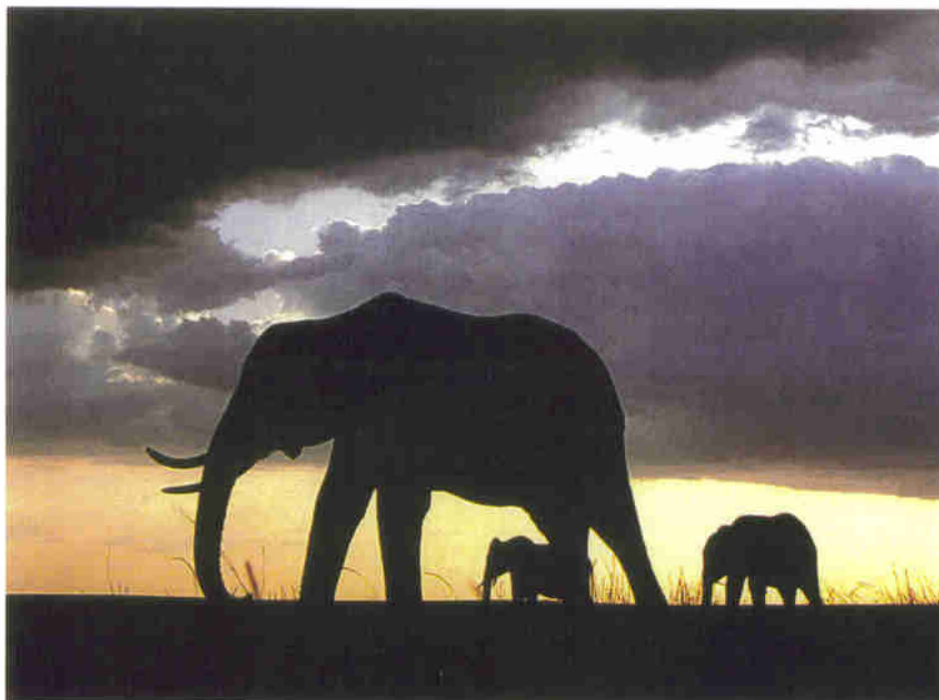
in Nairobi National Park, before being released into Tsavo East National Park. I also knew that spending time with the orphans would totally captivate me. My wife Angie and I have had memorable meetings with elephants in Botswana that now earned their keep with elephant-back safari teams. But the aim with these orphans was to allow them to become wild elephants again, no longer dependent on man for their survival.

It is a highlight of many people's Kenyan safari to visit the Nairobi elephant orphanage, to watch and photograph the tiny calves at the mud-wallow. Baby elephants are irresistible – they are funny, naughty, playful and joyful – quite capable, it seems, of showing many of the emotions that we humans like to think are



PICTURE: BBC/SIMON NASH





our private preserve. My television co-presenter Michaela spent her time with the Nairobi orphans recording the story of their rescue, and witnessed the special bond that develops between human keepers and elephant calves.

Meanwhile I was based at Voi in Tsavo East National Park. This is home to 30 older orphans, who range in age from two to 10. They have graduated from the Nairobi orphanage and are now ready to take their first real steps back into the wild. Each day the Voi herd leaves the safety of its sleeping stockade and heads out into the park with its keepers,

plenty of laughter and tears, and moments spent in the company of these amazing creatures that I shall never forget.

But is it worth all the time and money? I do believe it is. The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust does much more than provide a home for orphan elephants. It acts in an ambassadorial capacity on behalf of all elephants, helping to keep them firmly in the public domain.

Most importantly, perhaps, it helps to protect the whole of Tsavo by funding de-snaring teams that collect tens of thousands of wire snares each year. The senior warden estimates

## What adventures we have shared with the elephants over the past 12 months, moments spent with these amazing creatures that I shall never forget

feeding itself as it goes and mingling, from time to time, with wild herds. At around 11 o'clock, the elephants are led to a mud-wallow and given water, although the youngest calves are still bottle-fed with milk and a supplement to keep them healthy. At night, the herd returns to the stockade, safe from predators.

A number of orphans have long since made the transition back to the wild. Cows have mated with wild bulls and started their own families in the park. We were able to film the establishment of a new herd in the north of the park at Ithumba. What adventures and mishaps we have shared with the elephants over the past 12 months! There have been

that around 90,000 animals are lost each year due to snaring. The bush-meat trade is the biggest killer of animals in Africa and is responsible for the most excruciating deaths. Snares are cheap and reusable: they are also indiscriminate in terms of their targets. A number of orphan elephants bear scars – torn ears and trunks – from these necklaces of death.

Crucially, the Trust helps to enrol the support of the local people with an outreach programme, addressing their concerns while espousing the benefits of wildlife conservation.

*'Elephant Diary' is on BBC1 in July. For the Trust, see [www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org](http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org).*