



Mystery of the Missing Tusks

Image 1



Bushnell

10-28-2013 11:29:30

Image 2



Bushnell  Camera Name 70°F21°C 

10-13-2013 05:16:23

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Both male and female African elephants usually have tusks, which are long front teeth that grow outside their mouths. Elephants use their tusks to strip bark off trees for food and to dig holes for water and minerals. Male elephants also use their tusks to fight with other males for females. Males without tusks risk being severely wounded and are less likely to be reproductively successful.

These images were taken by cameras in Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique. They show two different African elephants: an elephant that has tusks and an elephant that does not. This absence of tusks, which is called **tusklessness**, is a natural, but usually rare, trait in African elephants.

Scientists are studying how rates of tusklessness in elephant populations — both in Gorongosa and in other regions of Africa — have changed, and are continuing to change, due to **poaching**: the illegal hunting and killing of elephants in order to harvest their tusks for ivory.