

# Comparing Elephants

**Directions:** Read the following information to learn about African elephants and Asian elephants. Color each elephant and then fill out the Venn diagram on the next page to compare the similarities and differences between the two different species.

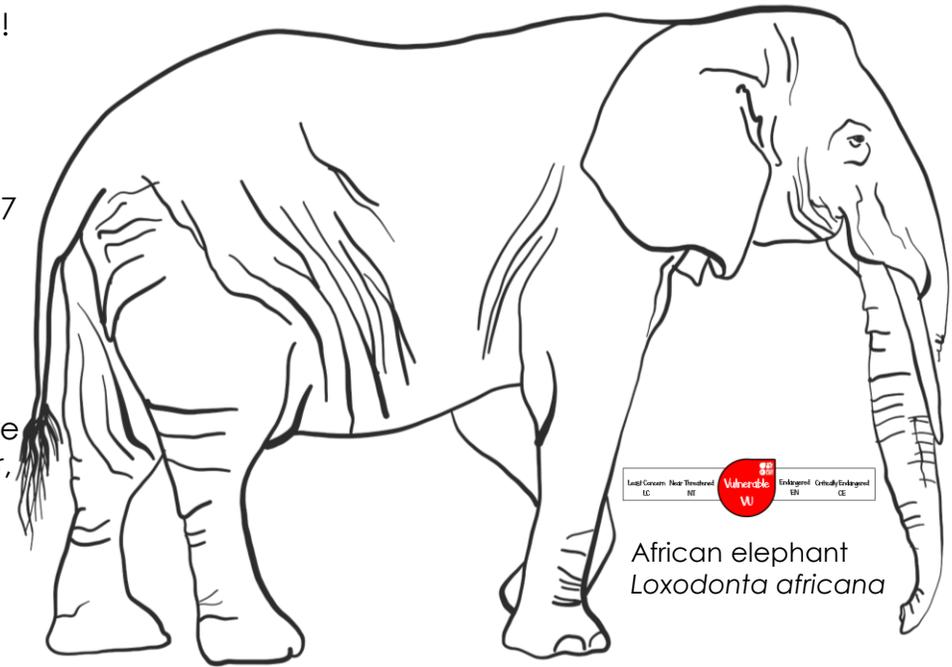
Who is the largest land animal of them all? That's right – elephants! Elephants are the largest mammals and have been around for over 55 million years! Although there are several subspecies, we are going to go over distinct species: African elephants and Asian elephants.

Although their diet and lifestyles are similar, African elephants are considerably larger than Asian elephants. African elephants weigh 2.5 – 7 tons while Asian elephants weigh 2.25 – 5.5 tons. They both have prehensile trunks which are used to smell, breath, communicate, drink, grab, and eat preferred foods such as roots, grasses, bark, and fruit to fuel their herbivorous diet. African elephants have two fingerlike projections at the end on their trunks while Asian elephants only have one. In addition to these trunks, both elephants also have tusks, which are continuously growing teeth. They use their tusks to battle with each other, dig for food and water, and to strip bark from trees. In Asian elephants, some males and females may grow tusks, but they are much smaller. However, African elephants, both male and female, are capable of growing large tusks.

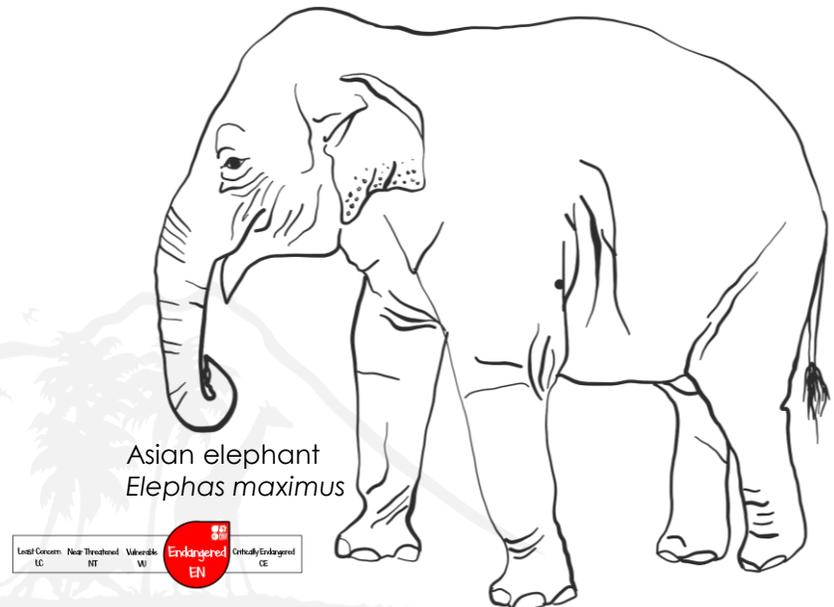
Elephants are very social animals that live in matriarchal herds, usually led by the biggest and oldest female. Female elephants, called cows, give birth to a single calf every 2-4 years after a 22-month gestation. Male elephants, or bulls, tend to be solitary or may even live in their own small herd of bulls.

An easy way to tell African elephants apart from Asian elephants is their ears. African elephants have much larger ears that resemble the shape of Africa, while Asian elephants have small, rounded ears. Elephants flap their ears to help keep them cool on hot days. They also cover themselves in dirt and mud to protect themselves from pesky bugs and the sun's powerful ray. All elephants' skin color can be various shades of gray but African elephants tend to have more wrinkled skin. Asian elephants sometimes lack color on their faces, ears, and trunks which is called depigmentation and can also result in spots or freckles.

Elephants play an important role in our ecosystem because they help disperse seeds, create natural pathways, encourage vegetation growth, dig up water, help maintain biodiversity, and much more!



African elephant  
*Loxodonta africana*



Asian elephant  
*Elephas maximus*

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African Elephants

Asian Elephants

Both



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- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/a/african-elephant/>
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