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A sudden influx of new Nursery orphaned elephants during the month of February prompted us to move four of the older orphans to our rehabilitation facility at Voi, Tsavo East National Park. At first we felt that the Ithumba Centre might perhaps be the best destination for them, that area having had more rain, and elephant browse more plentiful in its thicket cover, but then a heavy un-seasonal downpour around the area of the Voi Stockades, plus the condition of the diversions on the main Nairobi – Mombasa road, and another long rough section on a dirt track to reach Ithumba, forced a change of heart. Not only have the Voi Stockades remained empty since the successful rehabilitation of all 36 inmates 2 years ago back into the wild system, but the Voi Keepers were longing to become more than just antelope Keepers and Wild Elephant Monitors!

Joseph Sauni and his men were delighted, and hurriedly began preparing the Stockades for the new arrivals. For us at the Nursery, it was a very early start at 4 a.m. the morning of Saturday 21st February 2009, hoping to get the elephants loaded and on the road before the gridlock of Nairobi traffic which these days can hold a traveler up for hours, making any journey out of the capital city even more stressful for both man and beast alike!

With only four days of practice at going into the trucks parked at the Nursery Loading Bay, SHIMBA and SIRIA had no problem plucking up sufficient courage to go in for their milk. Wassesa was a little more apprehensive but was going in, and MZIMA would have none of it! When the time came, however, WASESSA had very definite second thoughts, and vocalized these loud and long, which alerted the others to a possible problem! She proved the most difficult elephant Robert Carr-Hartley and his very experienced father, Roy Carr-Hartley (Who has been involved in every orphan elephant move we have done) had ever had to deal with, and also arguably the largest, for WASESSA was a big two and a half year old with a couple of inches of tusk through the lip. Despite her apprehensive reluctance, and the fact that she was quite capable of flattening all the frail humans around her, she made no attempt to retaliate and eventually allowed herself to be muscled into the parked truck, testimony to the very gentle and tolerant nature of elephants to those they love despite their enormous strength. The door to her truck was hurriedly closed, and once inside with two Keepers by her side, she resigned herself to the inevitable and struggled no further.

SIRIA came next, and having heard what WASESSA had conveyed, he was also problematical about getting into the second truck, but eventually likewise obliged. Then it was the turn of mellow little SHIMBA who, always eager to please those he trusts and loves, obliged easily. Finding himself now alone outside in the dark, MZIMA decided that where SHIMBA goes, he goes too, because “a friend in need is a friend indeed”! To everyone’s surprise, he proved no problem at all.

It was past 5 a.m. when the three trucks drew out of the Nursery Compound, all the staff standing by to wave a fond farewell, for it is always a time of mixed emotions. They are going to a better place, with still many dependent years with their Keepers still by their side, and all still milk dependent, but now they have the opportunity of mixing with wild herds, and slowly slowly the

ability to assimilate into them. This process takes anywhere from eight to ten years. But losing them from our everyday lives here at the Nursery is always sad - for SHIMBA as been with us in the nursery since a tiny infant, but was now travelling to his new home with his best friends, MZIMA his stockade mate, SIRIA, and WASESSA . These special friendships, bonded more by them all of them sharing the same fate of losing their beloved elephant herd, will last a life time.

The road did indeed prove challenging, but at least the tarred stretch done by the Austrian Company Stabaag brought welcome relief, and by 1 p.m. the elephants walked out at the other end into their new home to embark on the next phase of their life's journey the slow process of making the first steps towards going back where they belong.

Having settled them in, fed them their milk and enjoyed a welcomed mudbath, and left them with their Keepers to explore their new surroundings, Robert and his father Roy went with Joseph Sauni in search of EMILY's unit to film an update on EMILY's two month old wild-born baby, little Eve. They found EMILY and her entourage with the baby just behind Mazinga Hill, about seven kilometers away from the stockades, with tiny Eve as ever enjoying the fulltime attention of two of her many orphaned "Minders", namely EDIE and Sweet Sally. They are attentive to the baby's every movement and every need. Little Eve just has to put her ears out and each Minder is with her in a flash, one on each side, gently propelling her back to her mother, who remains totally relaxed, secure in the knowledge that her baby must surely be the most spoiled little elephant in the world. Eve has a herd of "Minders", besides the two Chief Nannies, amongst whom is LAIKIPIA, the oldest and largest bull of EMILY's unit, who can always be counted upon to ward off over-eager "Baby Snatchers" from the wild community. What happened to one such wild candidate, is recorded in the January 2009 Keepers' Diary, who incurred the wrath not only of EMILY herself, but each Minder in turn, and who was eventually "Victory Mounted" by LAIKIPIA who stepped in to finalize the issue!

Back at the Stockades, during the night of Saturday – the first night that the 4 new arrivals were together in their new secure Voi Stockades that have seen so much Elephant History over the years, a lion roared close-by, and this scared them. However, Joseph Sauni and the Night Duty milk dispersers were sleeping nearby and were on hand to comfort and reassure their nervous charges. We are sure that it won't be long before EMILY and her entourage return to introduce themselves to the new arrivals, and that WASESSA will understand that she has, in fact, simply come home for she was found as an orphan just behind Irima Hill, not far from the Voi Stockades, and was very fortunate not to have ended up a meal for the lions who were only kept at bay by the passing Bull to whom she temporarily attached herself prior to the arrival at dusk of the rescue team. We will be moving their friends Sinya, Lempaute and Lesanju in May, assuming we are not forced to move them earlier due to congestion in the Nursery.

Most Sincerely,

Dr. Dame Daphne Sheldrick D.B.E.