

The Elephant Road

The elephants have used this path for longer than the farms have been here.

7 min read

Before you read

- **corridor** — a narrow route that animals use again and again
- **herd** — a large group of animals that move together
- **harvest** — the crop gathered in at the end of a growing season
- **deter** — to put an animal off doing what it meant to do
- **hive** — a box or nest where bees live
- **survey** — a careful record of what is found in a place
- **flatten** — to crush something down flat



Naserian walking the field edge at dawn with her notebook

¹ Naserian is out before her family wakes, walking the edge of the maize with a notebook under her arm. She is looking for footprints the size of dinner plates.

² She is eleven. Her village sits near Tsavo, in the south-east of Kenya, where farmland meets open country and elephants pass through on their way between water and forest.

³ "Here," she says, crouching. The print is deep at the front, which means the animal was walking quickly. She writes the date, the place and the direction. Then she counts the broken stalks and writes that down too.

⁴ Three years ago, elephants came through this field in October and flattened most of a harvest in a single night. A family can lose a year of food that way. People were angry, and some of them were frightened, and a few wanted the elephants driven off for good.

⁵ Then a researcher came and asked a question nobody in the village had thought to ask: where exactly do they cross?



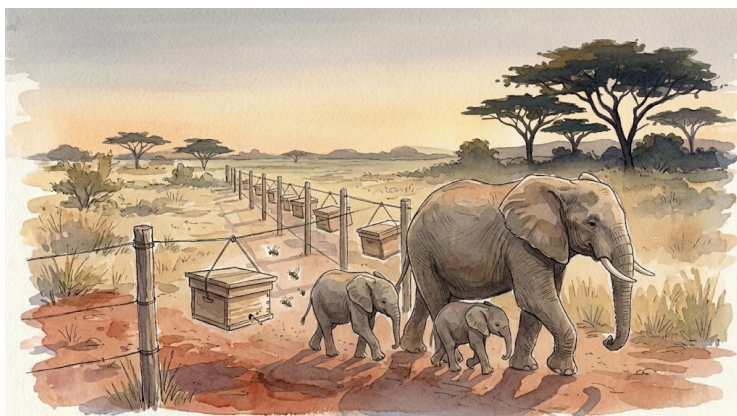
A fence of hanging beehives along the boundary of a farm

⁶ That is what Naserian's notebook is for. She is one of twelve young people doing the same survey along eight kilometres of farmland. Between them they have been recording crossings for two years.

⁷ The notebooks showed something nobody expected. The elephants were not wandering anywhere they pleased. Almost every crossing happened at four narrow places, and they were the same four places month after month.

⁸ The old people were not surprised. The herds, they said, had used those corridors long before the farms arrived.

⁹ Knowing where the elephants cross changes what you can do about it. You cannot fence eight kilometres. You can fence four gaps — and the fences here are unusual ones. They are made of beehives, hung in a line a few metres apart.



An elephant family turning away from a hive fence at dusk

¹⁰ Elephants are enormous and very hard to frighten. Bees are the exception. A disturbed hive sends bees towards the soft skin around an elephant's eyes and inside its trunk, and elephants remember. A herd that bumps a hive fence is deterred and usually turns aside, and the ones that have met bees before do not bump it twice.

¹¹ The fences are not perfect. In a dry year, when there is little else to eat, hungry elephants push through anyway. But crop damage along Naserian's stretch has dropped, and the hives give the families honey to sell, which is money that arrived because of the elephants rather than in spite of them.

¹² Naserian closes the notebook and heads back for breakfast. Behind her, the prints point the same way they pointed last October, and the October before that.

Part A Choose the best answer

Circle the letter next to the right answer.

1. What is Naserian recording in her notebook?
 - A how much honey each hive produces
 - B where, when and which way elephants cross
 - C the number of elephants born each year
 - D which families have lost their harvest
2. What did two years of notebooks reveal?
 - A the elephants crossed anywhere along the eight kilometres
 - B the elephants only crossed in October
 - C almost all crossings happened at the same four places
 - D the elephants had stopped using the old paths
3. Why do beehive fences work on elephants?
 - A the noise of the hives is too loud for them
 - B elephants cannot see the thin wire between hives
 - C bees sting the soft parts of an elephant and it remembers
 - D elephants are attracted to the honey instead
4. What does the passage say about the fences in a dry year?
 - A the bees leave the hives completely
 - B hungry elephants sometimes push through anyway
 - C the fences work better than usual
 - D the farmers take the hives down

Part B Write your answer

Answer in two or three sentences.

5. Explain why the researcher's question — where exactly do they cross? — turned out to be so useful to the village.

6. The passage says the honey is money that came because of the elephants rather than in spite of them. Explain what this means for how the families might now feel about the herds.

Part C Think deeper

There is no single right answer here. Say what you think, and show where in the passage it comes from.

7. The old people in the village were not surprised by what the notebooks showed. Using one detail from the passage, explain why the survey was still worth doing.

8. Naserian's work is slow, repeated and not very exciting, but it changed what her village could do. Describe something you have done, or could do, that works like this, and say what makes it worth the effort.

Answer key

For parents and teachers

Part A

1. B — where, when and which way they cross | 2. C — the same four places | 3. C — bees sting soft skin and elephants remember | 4. B — hungry elephants sometimes push through

Part B

5. Because you cannot fence eight kilometres, but you can protect four narrow crossings. Knowing exactly where the elephants go made a small, affordable solution possible. Accept any answer linking the knowledge to the practical choice.

6. The elephants now bring an income instead of only causing loss, so families have a reason to keep them rather than drive them off. Accept answers about attitudes changing, or about the elephants being worth something alive and nearby.

Part C

These answers vary. Mark the reasoning, not the answer.

7. Strong answers see that knowing something and being able to prove it with records are different — the notebooks turned local knowledge into evidence that could be acted on, and showed exactly which four gaps to fence. Prompt with: what could the notebooks do that memory could not?

8. Any honest example counts if the child explains the pay-off. The skill being practised is recognising that small repeated effort can produce a result that one big effort cannot.

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