

# Members on the Move for Conservation

## *An interview with EMA member Lynn Von Hagen*

This year, the Conservation Committee is highlighting EMA members that are making a difference for elephant conservation. For this issue of Gray Matters, we turn to **Lynn Von Hagen**, EMA member and 2021 EMA Small Grant recipient. She is currently in her final year as a PhD candidate at Auburn University. Her research broadly focuses on exploring diverse methods to promote human elephant coexistence in the Tsavo ecosystem of Kenya. She has been an EMA member since 2020.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY LYNN VON HAGEN

### **How long have you been involved in elephant conservation, and how did you get involved with elephant conservation?**

Officially since 2016, but I have adored elephants since I was a young girl and supported elephant conservation charities for over 20 years. I was fortunate to be able to pursue my MSc degree with Dr. Bruce Schulte at Western Kentucky University and join one of his ongoing elephant conservation projects.

### **Can you highlight any fun or unique details you would like to share?**

My research takes me for long stints living in the Kenyan bush, so funny stories are endless living that close to wildlife. One of my favorite stories I like to tell deals with elephants' amazing communication abilities. We stay in a camp that is protected by a fence, but wildlife often moves closely around the camp about 10 meters from where I sleep. We are usually woken up in the middle of the night by elephants fussing at each other from a nearby waterhole. One night I was settling down and almost asleep and felt this strange vibration in my chest that made me sit straight up in bed. I thought for a second something was wrong, but seconds later, I heard a bull rumble very close by. As you all probably know, elephants can produce infrasonic sounds below the range of human hearing. That vibration in my chest was me being able to feel the infrasonic sound (image when a big airplane takes off nearby and you can feel it!). Once the rumble moved into the audible range, I knew what had happened, but it was very exciting to actually feel it for the first time.

### **What impact did this opportunity have on you?**

My time in Kenya conducting research has given me a much greater appreciation for nature overall and the interconnectedness of all living things. Even more so is the realization of the burden that local and/or Indigenous people sometimes endure living so close to wildlife and not having the resources to protect their lives and livelihoods.

### **Why is conservation important to you?**

We are in the midst of dual biodiversity and climate crises that affects people, wildlife, and the ecosystems they dwell within. Conservation allows us to search for (and hopefully find) sustainable solutions that will preserve these components of our planet for the benefit and wonder of future generations.

### **Do you have any advice for other EMA members that are interested in conservation?**

As a non-traditional student that came to conservation later in life (despite an early passion for the subject), I hope I am an example of never giving up on what you truly want to do. No matter how much time has passed or whatever barriers may have arisen, if you feel you are meant to be working in conservation, carry on towards that goal no matter how long it takes! There are also many roles that can be filled in conservation even as a citizen scientist from afar as there are many projects that are constantly in need of help processing data if you are interested.

### **How can the EMA support your conservation efforts?**

I was grateful to be a recipient from the EMA Small Grants Program in 2021. These funds will help to facilitate a workshop program for local people struggling to live with wildlife in Kenya and help assess the effectiveness of the initiatives with surveys and other participatory engagements. This type of work will aid conservationists in customizing programs for local villagers to retain their livelihoods in the face of crop raiding by elephants, and reduce retaliatory actions towards elephants, thereby promoting coexistence.

*Thank you, Lynn, for taking the time to share your experiences with the EMA membership. Good luck in the pursuit of your PhD! You are an inspiration to us all. If you know someone who is involved with elephant conservation and should be highlighted, please email the Conservation Committee at [conservationema@gmail.com](mailto:conservationema@gmail.com).*