

The Elephant Whisperer Study Guide

The Elephant Whisperer by Lawrence Anthony

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Summary

“The Elephant Whisperer” by Lawrence Anthony with Graham Spence is a memoir about Anthony’s experiences as the proprietor and operator of Thula Thula a large animal reserve in middle Zululand in Africa. The focus of the story takes place in 1999, when Lawrence Anthony was contacted by an animal manager to offer him a herd of elephants at no cost. He suspected there was more to the story. As it turned out the elephant herd was an aggressive bunch that had become more than the owners of the reserve wanted to deal with. In fact, they had to shoot two of the elephants that belonged to the herd. The surviving elephants had been more traumatized than ever by the shooting of the elephants, one of which was the matriarch, the herd’s leader. Lawrence was their only hope. If he didn’t take them, they would all be shot.

Lawrence’s instinct was to say no because he knew having a herd of these humongous animals with apparently very bad natures would be the challenge of a lifetime. On the other hand he was an animal lover of the first order and he absolutely adored elephants. He didn’t hesitate more than a minute then agreed to take them.

When the herd arrived, it was soon confirmed to him that they were a troublesome lot. The new matriarch, who he named Nana, was frightened and in a rage. Lawrence’s staff had gone to great lengths to make a secure boma – a stockade like holding area – for the elephants. The plan was to confine them for a while until they settled down before they were released into the bush. But the elephants didn’t know about that plan. The very resourceful Nana figured out a way to break out of the electrified fencing that was constructed to contain the huge beasts.

It took days for Lawrence to get the elephants back. They were rampaging around the area and broke into a neighboring reserve. The local authorities had declared the rogue elephant herd a menace and danger to the people and property of the region and sent out armed rangers to take them down. But Lawrence was able to find them first and make arrangements to return them to the reserve.

Lawrence observed the elephants and understood that they had gone through quite an ordeal. It was his educated belief that he had to make peace with Nana, the matriarch, or things wouldn’t work out. Although Nan was naturally standoffish at first, Lawrence was tireless in his attempt to settle her and convince her to trust humans again. But he asked himself how he could reach her and explain that this reserve was her new home and that she and her herd were safe there. He decided to talk to her. Every chance he got he spoke to her, calling her by name and always using a calm and gentle voice.

Lawrence knew he had connected with her when she approached him while he sat in his Rover. He reached his hand out to her and she responded with her trunk. She stuck her trunk in the car window and investigated Lawrence’s face and torso. She soon took off to return to her herd. But after that incident, Nana never again appeared agitated or aggressive around Lawrence, and Lawrence never stopped talking to her.



Chapters 1 through 6

Summary

Lawrence Anthony is the owner and operator of Thula Thula, a large African game reserve. He received a call from Marion Garai of the Elephant Managers and Owners Association (EMOA), who said she heard of the good work on conservation being done at Thula Thula. Marion wanted to know if Lawrence would be interested in taking a herd of elephants, free of charge. The owners wanted to get rid of them because they were troublesome. They would be put down soon if he didn't take them. The matriarch of the herd kept figuring out a way to escape from electric fences. She wrapped the wire around her tusks and took the voltage until the fence was sprung. She also unlatched other fences. Marion had heard Lawrence had a way with animals.

Lawrence was about to say no but he had loved elephants all his life. There were three adult females, three youngsters, an adolescent bull and two babies. He worried if the addition of elephants would spark more poaching activity because of the animals' ivory tusks. He took them anyway.

The owners gave Lawrence only two weeks to prepare for them. There was a lot to do – electrifying fences and building a sturdy stockade or boma that also had to be electrified. The force is not deadly; it is designed to warn them away. He told David and Ndonga that he was now the owner of a herd of elephants. David was thrilled. Ndonga knew he was taking on a lot. He called his Zulu staff and put the word out that they needed a team of laborers. By the next day, hundreds of Zulus showed up wanting work. Most Zulus had never seen an elephant since most were in South Africa in reserves. He spoke to the chieftains first who were worried about the safety of their people and their crops.

When the elephants were on their way, Lawrence noticed that the wiring was on the wrong side of the fence. There wasn't time to correct it before the inspectors came. Luckily the inspector didn't notice, so Lawrence put every man on the task of correcting the wiring. The inspector had approved a tree near the fence to stay because it was a tombotie tree too large for even an elephant to down. Francoise received a call that the matriarch and her baby were shot during capture. Lawrence was upset but was determined to save the rest of the herd.

The elephants had to be drugged and coaxed out of the articulated truck that delivered them. The large female, the new matriarch, stepped out first followed by the six others. The teenage bull, whose mother and baby sister had been shot, tried to charge them but stopped just before slamming into a fence. Lawrence named the matriarch Nana and the young bull Mnumzane. Frankie was the second female in command. Nana tried the electric fence but backed off. She led the herd off to the watering hole. Lawrence would have to judge how long he should keep the herd penned in the stockade before he let them roam free.



The next morning Lawrence was greeted with the news that the elephants had broken out of the boma. The two largest elephants had toppled a tree to break down the fence shorting the wires. It took several days to track the elephants. Lawrence got word that the elephants had been captured and that they would be brought back the next day.

The first day after their return Lawrence stayed a comfortable distance away from the herd. Each day they moved a little closer. Nana and Frankie watched them. David woke Lawrence up one night. Nana was standing near the fence with the others behind her. She took a step forward. Lawrence approached her and pleaded with her not to leave; this was her home now. He warned her that they would all die if they left. If she could take the voltage, the fence wouldn't hold and they'd be gone again. Lawrence felt something between him and Nana. She suddenly turned away from the fence and went back into the bush. Lawrence had hope.

Just before sunrise each day, the herd would pace up and down the length of the fence. The elephants were so agitated that it was difficult to feed them without them going into a raging rampage. While Lawrence distracted them, David threw bales of alfalfa over the fence away from the herd. Then David would distract them and Lawrence threw alfalfa over. The elephants gradually grew more accustomed to them but were still agitated. The hour before dawn every day, the herd would line up facing north where their home was. Every morning, Lawrence would plead with Nana not to go.

Analysis

In this first chapter, Lawrence Anthony sets the stage for his memoir about the relationship he built between himself and his elephants. He begins by providing a glimpse of life on a huge African game reserve. He demonstrates that it was not an idle, care-free life; rather it was a chaotic life where the unexpected becomes the norm. He begins the story when he was in the midst of a conflict with poachers who were killing his beautiful nyala antelopes for their hide and horns and then received a phone call offering him a herd of troubled elephants.

Anthony taking on the elephants who were traumatized by the killing of some of their members was the biggest challenge he ever faced. The elephants were agitated and frightened when he received them. His interaction with the elephants and his herculean efforts to reach them and convey to them that they were safe and could trust humans again is the heart of the story.

Anyone interested in African wildlife and conservation will enjoy reading about the elephants and how Lawrence Anthony saved them from a death sentence. The story is appealing because of Anthony's unquestionable love and devotion to the animals in his reserve. The readers will find his story admirable and inspirational.

Vocabulary

scourge, poachers, acrid, cordite, quagmire, indigenous, polygamous, chauvinism, dilapidated, savannah, articulated, pontificating, acrimonious, apartheid, incessantly



Chapters 7 through 12

Summary

The elephants continued to topple trees but none were close enough to the fence to do any damage. One tall acacia tree was toppled and though it was a good distance away, it bounced when it fell and some of its branches snagged the wires. David volunteered to sneak inside the boma and cut the branches away from the wires. Lawrence enlisted the help of some of his rangers who aimed their rifles in case he was charged. Frankie caught sight of David and charged him. Lawrence radioed David to get out but the message didn't go through.

Lawrence was just about to fire at the charging elephant's brain when David was right next to him. He had scaled the eight-foot-high electrical fence. Miraculously he had survived the 8,000 volts that the fence put out by stepping around each of the live wires. David went back in and finished the job.

After an incident with a cobra, Max was rushed to a vet. The vet treated him and ensured Lawrence that he wouldn't lose his sight from the venom sprayed into his eyes by the cobra. The next dawn in the boma, the same ritual occurred – Nana positioning herself to escape and Lawrence begged her not to go. For the first time she turned and faced Lawrence; things had changed between them.

One morning, Lawrence woke up to see Nana and her baby Mandla at the fence in front of the camp. She looked directly at him; he decided to go to her. She reached her trunk out to Lawrence which could have resulted in tragedy. But he felt safe and walked closer to her. As she moved her trunk closer to him, he touched it. Lawrence decided it was time to let them out from the boma and let them roam freely on the reserve. Lawrence made sure that the outer fence was fully powered and that the power was off on the boma fence.

David lifted the gate and Lawrence called to Nana. Eventually she moved to the gate and tested the open space with her trunk. She ventured into the exit but stopped in the middle because of a trench filled with rain water directly in front of the gate. Finally she pushed over the eucalyptus poles that were buried in concrete holding up the gate and went through. The herd followed her.

Nana was using her trunk as she moved down the fence to see if there were any weak spots in the electrical power. It had taken the herd the entire day to make it around the reserve. Despite Ndonga's assurance that all the trees had been chopped down near the fence, there was one large acacia still standing. Nana and Frankie inspected it closely. Lawrence shouted "No, Nana, no!" But the elephants soon toppled the tree which fell on the fence and short-circuited the wiring. Luckily an electrician was on site and soon got the power ramped up. While it was being repaired Lawrence continued to talk to Nana, to calm her and reassure her.



Lawrence began to suspect that his Ovambo weren't rangers, but rather that they were poachers! He recalled that Bheki had told him there was gunfire the first night the elephants escaped. Had the Ovambos wanted to agitate the elephants? The poachers didn't want the elephants there because they could no longer have free rein on the territory. They wanted the elephants to escape and be taken out. That was why they strung the wires on the wrong side of the boma – they didn't want the elephants restrained. It was pure sabotage. The elephants were in danger from his own men.

David was furious about the Ovambos; he was ready to come to blows with them. But Lawrence convinced him they had to approach the situation with caution. They had to pretend everything was okay until they gather the evidence. Lawrence instructed David to have their best guards keep an eye on the Ovambos 24/7. The herd was content and grazing in the middle of the reserve far away from the fences.

Analysis

Despite his love for animals, Lawrence relates an episode in which he was on the verge of destroying an elephant. Although he had no choice given the circumstances, the mere possibility of killing the animal gave him much personal anguish and pain. He was close to killing one of the elephants that was charging one of his aides when the aide was able to escape at the last minute. This incident demonstrates that Lawrence is not a fanatic and recognizes that human life is more valuable than animal life. However, the reader can understand how much it would have hurt Lawrence if he had killed the charging elephant.

While the elephants had adjusted somewhat by this time, Lawrence kept his eyes on the elephants, especially the matriarch, Nana. She was extremely protective of her herd and was very bright and resourceful. She explored the fencing for a weak spot. This section provides more information about the habits of elephants. Nana was seeking a way out because there was an innate drive to return to their homeland.

More sub-stories in this memoir come to bear in this chapter. There were more problems with poachers and the startling realization that some of the poaching was being perpetrated by insiders. The sense of betrayal rocked Lawrence and made him more determined than ever to rid the reserve of these predatory people. This section is educational for the casual reader, as it provides inside information about the operation of poachers and the devastation that they leave in their wake.

Vocabulary

mesmerized, atavistic, augured, benign, thrum, sauntered, ablutions, imperiously, pariah, ostentatiously, mesmeric, inexplicably



Chapters 13 through 18

Summary

Things were better with the elephants. The herd was settled and the poachers had been chased off for the time being. Lawrence was in talks with surrounding farmers to make their land in to a game reserve. Lawrence was able return his attention to his main role: running an African wildlife reserve. He still devoted much of his time to the elephants who were flourishing.

One obvious result of the absence of the poachers was that antelopes, wildebeest and impala began to venture out sensing that the danger was gone. At night there were leopards, lynx and hyenas. Lawrence was relieved to see that despite the heavy poaching that had gone on, there were still healthy populations of the various species. It was amazing that the animals knew that the poaching threat had passed and came out knowing that it was safe. Lawrence and David witnessed a huge martial eagle snatch a monkey off a tree branch. Another day one of the eagles took a nyala fawn. The martial eagle with its seven foot wingspan was a sight to see. Lawrence felt that the bad times were behind him but he was wrong.

Lawrence took Francoise on a ride to track the elephants. He was impressed with her ability to adapt to her new world after having lived in Paris all her life. They spotted the herd and followed it to the river. But Lawrence had miscalculated and suddenly they were surrounded by the elephants. They had driven between the baby elephants and Frankie, their mother. The babies started squealing loudly. Frankie was coming at them. They were trapped and in deep trouble. He had placed Francoise in grave danger. He gave her his 9mm pistol just in case.

Lawrence and Francoise stayed still while Frankie charged. Her pinned back ears and rolled up trunk both were indications that she meant business. Lawrence began talking to her then screaming at her. She stopped at the last minute and glared down at Lawrence and Francoise on their motorbike. She turned and tended to her babies.

Frankie had made a conscious decision to stop, David offered later. Lawrence was befuddled. Elephants don't typically stop when they're on a charge. He recalled that he had yelled to her that it was him. "It's me, Frankie!" She had to have recognized him and had observed Nana, the matriarch, interact with him.

The power was down on the fence on the western boundary. They were having continuing problems with their electrical system. Everything from animals to lightning and rain were causing damage to the fences. They learned that both Nana and Frankie had been impregnated by the dominant bull on the reserve they came from. The rangers and guards were ordered to patrol the fences day and night.



The Range Rover wouldn't start so David took the tractor. It was dangerous because it had no lights putting him at a great disadvantage with the animals who all had superior night vision. After David left, Lawrence realized that he'd forgotten his radio. Waiting on the front porch for David to return, a chill went through Lawrence's body when he heard the roar of a lion. There were no lions on the reserve so it meant that the lion had broken in somehow. There was a second roar meaning that there were two lions on the property. Nana undoubtedly heard the roar, too, and knew the danger. The lions would be in control of the reserve until they were driven out or removed. Lawrence was worried about David who was in the bush at night with a torch but no gun.

Lawrence and Bheki hurried to help David. Roars were heard again and were closer. They found David by the hole that the lions had dug to get in. They filled in the hole and got the power working again. David left the tractor and walked back with Lawrence and Bheki. Lawrence called the Parks Board to inform them that the two lions were on Thula. They would send rangers at once to capture them. The Parks rangers tracked the lions for two days. Finally they discovered another hole under a fence. The lions were gone. They returned to Umfolozi.

So much progress had been made with the elephants. Lawrence's euphoria over the late-night visit by Nana and the herd was cut short when he received a call from Bheki that the elephants were trying to kill them. He was miles away on the other side of the reserve. Lawrence told Bheki that he and his men should seek cover. There were gunshots. Bheki said that Ngwenya was shooting. The phone went dead. Lawrence and David took off immediately to help Bheki.

Analysis

In this section, there is an ominous sense that keeping the herd of elephants may not be in the cards. Frankie, the other mature female elephant, charged Lawrence and Francoise. They were able to escape with their lives but Lawrence had to consider the lives of his staff and visitors to the reserve. He loved the elephants but the size disparity between elephant and human may preclude their close co-habitation. By now the reader knows that Lawrence would do anything to keep the elephants short of endangering humans.

But the herd was flourishing and had made the reserve its own. There is a hint that despite the fact that the reserve was 5,000 acres, it may be too small for a herd of elephants. Each elephant weighed between three and six tons so there was no contest between an elephant and a human and even an elephant and a car. Therefore, workers and visitors were not safe in a car if an elephant charged it. Lawrence knew that the young bull, Mnumzane, would benefit with the addition of another bull to hang around with but the reserve was not large enough to add a mature bull.

The danger of several rogue lions that broke into the reserve was a threat to animal and human alike. This episode demonstrates yet another peril that exists for an animal reserve in the African wild. The lions broke out from another reserve and were drawn to



Thula Thula because of the antelopes and zebras that flourished there. Thula Thula did not have any of their own lions because it was not large enough.

Anthony's narrative is very informative and educational.

Vocabulary

veldt, bravado, raucous, profound, minuscule, surreally, gesticulating, ludicrous, mandatory, onomatopoeic, reciprocated, charismatic, iconic, impervious, gravitas



Chapters 19 through 24

Summary

Lawrence visited the herd every day. He wanted to learn more about their communications skills. One afternoon he began getting strange sensations like he was with the herd yet it wasn't anywhere in sight. When he got that sensation another time, Nana suddenly emerged from the bush. When the elephants weren't around, Lawrence felt an emptiness. He determined that the deep rumblings of the elephants echoed for miles and that was what he was picking up on even though he couldn't hear it.

One day Mnumzane blocked Lawrence as he was driving through the reserve. He dawdled for twenty minutes browsing around the Land Rover and seemingly in no hurry to leave. When the radio squawked on, he tensed. He blocked Lawrence from leaving several times. He didn't seem to want him to go. Lawrence began talking to him. He sensed a sharing of emotions with the huge animal.

All the elephants felt comfortable coming closer to Lawrence and the Land Rover. On one occasion, Nana stopped feeding and walked right up to the car and put her trunk in the window. It was warm and affectionate. She was telling him that it was fine for him to be there. Even Frankie began to reach out to Lawrence. He had to remind himself that they were wild animals. The Land Rover took a beating during that period with all the patting and exploring that the animals did around the vehicle. They loved to play with his side mirrors and aerials which were soon long gone. They stole anything that was in the back including spare tires that were never found.

It was getting time for Nana and Frankie to have their babies. Lawrence kept a close eye on them which wasn't difficult because they were visiting the house more frequently. They would greet Lawrence when he would return from a business trip. He learned more about their amazing ability to communicate through their low frequency stomach rumblings that transmitted infrasound vibrations. The process is similar to the communication system of whales. It is generally accepted that elephants can communicate with other elephants across the entire continent.

One day David told Lawrence he couldn't find the elephants although there was no sign that they had broken out. Lawrence guessed that Nana may have gone deep in the bush to have her baby. Lawrence got in the Rover to look for them. He found signs of the herd and yelled for Nana. Finally she emerged from the bush but didn't come forward. Standing next to her was her new baby. The rest of the herd followed as Nana made her way to the Rover. She brought her baby for Lawrence to see. She reached her trunk into the car and touched Lawrence and immediately moved her trunk to caress her baby. Lawrence named him Mvula. Two weeks later he went through the same ritual with Frankie and her new baby. Frankie didn't stop by the Rover; however, she passed by so she could show off her baby, a girl who Lawrence named Ilanga. A year ago, Lawrence would have been dead if he had gotten that close to Frankie and her baby.



The elephants came to the house that evening with Frankie and her baby in the lead. A year later they visited and watched Lawrence who proudly showed them his first grandchild.

The elephants were a hit with reserve guests who drove their cars through the reserve. Lawrence began walking near the animals because he wanted to encourage walking safaris. On his first attempt he zigzagged up to the herd. Frankie caught his scent and watched him. When she spread her ears, he knew that it was her red line and he stayed at that distance. He repeated the same exercise several times. When he pushed it, Frankie was angered. He repeated the process with Nana who let him get closer. Over the next few weeks he learned the invisible boundaries that the herd set up. He had one of his rangers try the exercise but he couldn't get as far proving that the elephants were more leery of strangers.

Lawrence spent endless hours walking about the elephants. One day Nana and Frankie broke the boundary and came closer to Lawrence. He learned it was best to let them come to him. Lawrence continued walking around the elephants. One of his rangers, Vusi, also learned a degree of trust from Nana. He saw the change in the other elephants as though Nana had told them that it was safe for them to be around them. He determined that after a herd is traumatized they are only able to trust humans again if the matriarch trusts them first. Reserve guests could now enjoy walking safaris.

Analysis

Lawrence Anthony learned more and more about the elephants and, of course, passes that information onto his readers. He at first ignored some slight vibrations that he thought he felt. But they were too prolonged and persistent to ignore. As it turns out, scientists have learned that elephants communicate with one another with what are basically stomach rumblings. Elephants transmit messages using infrasound vibrations from their stomachs. They are sent in ultra-low frequencies that can only be felt and not heard, at least by humans. They are wavelengths similar to those used by whales to communicate with their pod members. Anyone interested in animal behavior will find this fascinating.

Lawrence demonstrates his complete dedication to the animals by trying to make peace with all of the elephants in the herd. Although he never was able to achieve a close relationship with the others like the one he enjoyed with Nana, his persistence is admirable. And because he took the time to develop at least a truce with some of the more aggressive elephants, he made the reserve safer for his workers and his visitors. By doing so there is an implicit recognition that the elephants could not remain on the reserve if they were a threat to humans. He had two reasons for his work with the elephants – he wanted to keep them and he didn't want them to be a danger.

The herd was growing with the birth of babies to both Nana and Frankie. They had been impregnated by a bull on their former reserve. With his love of animals, Lawrence looked forward to welcoming more elephants. But little elephants quickly grow into



three-ton elephants and the problem looms that in the future he would have to separate the herd or expand the reserve.

Lawrence's experiences demonstrate that even with the prospect of new life on the reserve, there are always problems and realities that complicate such joy.

Vocabulary

invigorating, manifested, guttural, tactile, transcended, sporadically, tantamount, aphrodisiacal, fusillade, cacophony, affinity, apartheid, entomology, atavistic, internecine, imbroglia



Chapters 25 through 30

Summary

Francoise managed the new boutique hotel and named it the Elephant Safari Lodge. The cattlemen were still trying to sabotage the game-reserve project. The security police called Lawrence's mother and told her that assassins had been hired to kill Lawrence. If Lawrence was killed, the cattlemen would be able to take Thula Thula back. The police had names but couldn't arrest the men because the accusation was just hearsay. Lawrence had to act quickly and confront the threat.

Lawrence visited the indula, a headman in the tribe, Lawrence told the police about the assassination plot. The indula denied that it could be any of his tribe but Lawrence told him that the police had their names. A short while later four men joined the meeting – the men who were named as assassins. The men denied that they were hired to kill Lawrence but saw that they were losing the indula's support. They were armed but so was Lawrence. Lawrence told them all he wanted was their assurance that he was not a marked man. The indula agreed. Even if he was involved in the plot, he would not go back on this public assurance. Driving home, Lawrence felt assured that no harm would come to him and that his enemies were in retreat.

Lawrence took on another troubled elephant whose herd had been killed. She was the only elephant on a large reserve and was in deep despair. Lawrence named her ET. Lawrence worked with ET and introduced her to the herd which immediately accepted her. But she remained standoffish and agitated toward Lawrence. He wasn't sure what Nana's reaction would be if she were to attack. She was thrilled with her new family. Mnumzane was still ostracized. The reserve wasn't large enough to bring in another mature bull for him to herd with. One day, Penny, Francoise's bull terrier was missing and Lawrence couldn't find her. He tracked her to one of the pools. He found her near a large croc. She had been snatched and drowned. Lawrence carried her body back to the lodge and buried her. Checking out the tracks around the pools, Lawrence was convinced that it was the scrappy little Penny that had attacked the croc.

One day ET came charging at Lawrence who was too far away from his car to escape. He stood his ground. Nana was nearby and blocked ET's path. ET stumbled but regained her balance. Lawrence had been planning to limit his visits to the herd. They were wild animals that should not be interacting with humans on a regular basis. Lawrence was concerned that ET would be a problem for visitors driving through on safari. He needed to see that she was more settled. One of his tactics was to challenge her directly. He couldn't do so on foot so he used his Rover to approach her. She seemed less aggressive when he talked to her from the car. Lawrence was surprised one day when he was caught on foot by a charging ET and both Nana and Frankie came to his rescue.



That spring a huge storm loomed. A vicious storm raged on the reserve. The heavy rain caused puddles which morphed into streams. At first Lawrence was thrilled with the downpour. The reserve needed the water. But the heavy rain continued all day and night. The electricity went out and the river was rising. Lawrence and Francoise drove the Rover down to see the river which was a roaring torrent. They got caught in the slippery mud and almost went down the river bank in the roaring river where dead cows were streaming by. Lawrence radioed Brendan to get the tractor to the Rover out. The threat of crocodiles slithering around in the slime was a real one.

The river overflowed even surging across the lawn at the lodge. The rain finally stopped when the river was approaching the house. The river had broken the fence on 500 yards on the eastern boundary. The elephants had found higher ground that was nowhere near the broken fence. Later, Nana and Frankie were pacing along the fence stopping to shake it frequently. They were obviously very agitated. Nana's first born, Mandla, had somehow been separated from the herd and was on the wrong side of the fence. They had to get Mandla back with the herd or else the elephants would break the fence down. It was a hassle getting Mandla back on the right side of the fence but finally they are reunited and the adult elephants settled down. Musa, one of Lawrence's rangers, volunteered to risk his safety by luring the elephant to the opening that had been cut in the fence to allow Mandla back in.

Analysis

As if the existing herd wasn't enough, Lawrence took on another troubled elephant. ET had been the only survivor of another herd and was on a reserve by herself. She was very depressed which, for elephants, leads to hostility and violence. Just like the others, ET was targeted to die. As soon as Lawrence realized that, it was enough for him to rescue her. Just like the other elephants, she came to him agitated and frightened. He worked as closely as he could with her but they never achieved a close relationship but rather an understanding and a truce.

The sub-story in this section is about a spring storm that resulted in a dangerous flood that impacted both the humans and animals of the reserve. Lawrence and Francoise were nearly swept away in the river when their Rover slipped down the bank. A danger inherent in such a flood was the crocs that slithered closer to the house and lodge where humans were.

This section also showcases another dimension of the elephants. When the flood was raging at its worst, one of the juvenile elephants became separated from the herd. Somehow he wound up on one side of the fence and the rest of the herd on the other. The mature females shook the fence violently and were ready to tear the place up until Lawrence and his rangers were able to reunite them.

Vocabulary

snippet, sustenance, inordinate, serendipity, perfunctory, benevolent, pachyderm, obliterating, virtuoso, stoicism, clandestine, surreptitiously, ensconced



Chapters 31 through 36

Summary

Lawrence checked on the herd after hearing there was a ruckus among the elephants the night before. Mnumzane seemed very confident and no longer reticent. He moved right into the water hole where the others were drinking and splashed around. Mnumzane advanced toward Frankie and smacked her backwards nearly toppling her. Nana got in between the herd and Mnumzane, bracing for a blow. Mnumzane had come of age and would now be the first to drink at the water hole. He was the big new boss on Thula Thula.

Nana and her babies came and raided Françoise's herb garden. Nothing she did drove Nana away. She banged pots and pans and doused her with a high pressure hose. She totally ignored Françoise and destroyed her garden. The elephants loved water and entered the dam on the overflow wall. Enjoying the reserve as spring set in, Lawrence was taking a nap in the grass. Max was lapping the water at the river's edge. Suddenly Lawrence had a premonition. He looked down at the river bank where Max was and spotted a huge croc silently moving right for him. Lawrence was finally able to get Max to come to him. Lawrence grabbed Max and ran for both of their lives.

Mnumzane impregnated Nandi, Nana's oldest offspring. A ranger called Lawrence to tell him Nandi apparently had her baby but she was surrounded by the elephants down near the river. The herd was behaving strangely. Lawrence was able to get a glimpse of the baby. It was lying on the ground which wasn't a good sign. Frankie stopped Lawrence from getting too close. The newborn tried to stand but couldn't. Lawrence saw with his binoculars that the baby's front feet were deformed. The elephants wrapped their trunks around her and stood her up but she could not remain standing on her own. Nandi and Frankie were standing over the baby to make shade for it. But the baby was fading.

The only chance the baby had was for Lawrence to get her to a vet. Getting a baby away from its mother and herd was really impossible. The herd stayed with the baby through the night and into the next day. Nana finally turned and walked away with the rest of the herd except Nandi following suit. They could not save the baby. The baby was still barely alive and with only Nandi there, Lawrence felt there was a chance to get the baby. He loaded his truck with water and alfalfa to lure her away. His men would load up the baby in the truck while she was eating and drinking. Lawrence coaxed the thirsty and hungry Nandi away slowly reversing his Rover as she followed. He talked to Nandi as she drank insatiably knowing that his men were taking her baby.

After eating and drinking she walked back to where the baby was, sniffed the ground and then turned in the direction of the herd. The vet was treating the baby who was sprawled out on the lawn at the house. The vet was hydrating her with a drip, Lawrence was gathering feeding equipment and Françoise was making the spare room into an



elephant nursery for Thula which is what Lawrence named her. Her feet had been squashed in the womb but the bones and muscles were intact. The vet believed her feet could be corrected. Johnny stayed with Thula in her nursery. She was stronger the next day and drank a giant-sized bottle of formula. She was placed on a sling that allowed her feet to reach the floor to begin exercising them. She began to stand steadily. Within a week she was hobbling on the lawn unsupported. Feeding her was a challenge since baby elephants have an innate need to suckle from their mothers. But she got sufficient nourishment and became stronger.

But Thula began having trouble standing and was given anti-inflammatory medications to counter the painful swelling she was experiencing. The pain continued and she began to refuse her bottle. She passed away one night. It was a blow to the entire staff. Her body was taken out to the bush. Lawrence led the herd there. The elephants gathered around the carcass telling her a final goodbye.

Analysis

This chapter tells the story of an elephant that Lawrence was unable to save though try he did, and valiantly so. Nandi, a young female, had a baby that was named Thula – after the reserve, of course. Lawrence knew there was trouble when the baby did not stand up when it was born. Generally, elephants stand up almost immediately after birth – more education about the elephant for the reader. However, Thula just laid there. The love and dedication that the elephants had for this baby was nothing less than astounding. They stood around the baby not just for hours but for days. They tried standing her up with their trunks but the baby just fell back down.

Lawrence, always eager to save an animal, was able to distract the hungry and thirsty elephants with food and water, and had his rangers snatch the baby and bring her to the house. The vet explained that she was so large that her feet were folded under in the womb and caused them to be deformed. But he thought they could be corrected through exercise.

Lawrence, Francoise and the rangers worked day and night with the elephant. She showed improvement for a while but then faded and died. It was a sad day for everyone when they brought the carcass out into the bush so the elephants could say goodbye to her.

It is obvious to the reader at this point, that losing one animal was one animal too many for Lawrence.

Vocabulary

languidly, palpable, tactile, periphery, impinged, connotation, lambasted, proviso, retribution, calamitous

Chapters 37 through 42

Summary

Lawrence introduced a herd of Cape buffalo to the reserve. They are regal and dangerous and symbolize Africa. Things did not go well when they were delivered. Two cows had died which sparked an investigation and a bull almost gored the delivery driver who had to run for his life to elude him. Due to the aggressiveness of the bull, Lawrence decided to cancel all walking safaris for the time being. He instructed Bheki to alert all the staff and guards. Max was fourteen years old and suffering from debilitating arthritis. It was time to put him down. Lawrence held him as the vet administered the “loneliest of all injections.” Lawrence was crushed.

A month after Max died, Francoise wanted to know when they would be getting married. They’d been together eighteen years and were married under common law but that wasn’t enough for Francoise. His mother called to tell him that some government officials would be visiting Zululand and staying at the lodge. When he looked in the lodge, there looked to be a wedding going on, a common event at the lodge. But it was a ruse that Francoise and his mother had cooked up. When he asked who was getting married they told him he was. Everyone was in on it including his staff. The ceremony was held right then so he didn’t have time to wiggle out of it. When the minister asked if he took “this woman to be my wife” the whole room responded, “He does!”

Mnumzane began exhibiting aberrant behavior. He violently charged several Rover safaris culminating in his destroying Lawrence’s new Rover. Although Lawrence tried desperately to work with him, he had no choice in the end but to put him down. Lawrence was devastated.

Lawrence met with Nkosi Biyela to discuss the Royal Zulu, the game reserve project that Lawrence had begun with his father so many years before. The area surrounding Thula Thula belonged to the Zulus. Nkosi wanted to join the lands to make one big reserve. If another tract of land, the Mlosheni, was included, the reserve could be joined with the Umfolozi Reserve and they would have a massive reserve. The Nkosi assured Lawrence that he would see to it that the Mlosheni tract would be part of the merger. The realization of the project would improve the economy of the Zulus and create jobs for the people.

It was apparent that Iraq would soon be invaded. Lawrence was compelled to travel there to rescue the zoo animals. The zoo had the largest number of animals in the Middle East. It took months for Lawrence and Brendan to save the animals in Iraq and in other Middle Eastern countries. Brendan stayed there a year to continue the work and then went on to Afghanistan on behalf of zoo animals there.

Lawrence returned home from the fighting and horrid conditions in Iraq after six months. He and Brendan did as much as they could to keep starving and dehydrated animals



alive. He wrote the book, "Babylon's Ark," after he returned to recount the impact of the war on the country and people and on its animals. He also created The Earth Organization which creates safeguards against the decline of the earth's plants and animals.

When Lawrence returned to the reserve, the elephants were there to greet him. It was an emotional reunion on both sides. The herd had now grown to fourteen. He may have saved their lives but what they gave him was just as valuable. Nana showed him how much family meant; Frankie demonstrated the strength of loyalty; Nandi showed him true mother's love; Mandla was a survivor of an uncertain upbringing; Marula and Mabula were the products of Frankie's good mothering; and, from ET he learned forgiveness. His biggest regret was not understanding what had made Mnumzane begin exhibiting violent and aberrant behavior. Finally, he learned that the only walls between humans and animals are the ones erected by man.

Lawrence had hopes that with the expansion of the reserve with the Royal Zulu project that more elephants could be brought into the reserve so that ostracized bulls like Mnumzane could hook up with other young male outcasts from other herds. He would not interact with new herds that were brought in. After Nana's horrid experience at her first reserve, it was necessary for Lawrence to develop an open and friendly relationship with her to calm her worries about humans.

Animals were born to be free. To Lawrence the only good cage is an empty one.

Analysis

The cycle of life is nowhere more apparent than in the African bush. While Lawrence decided to bring in a new species – the elegant Cape buffalo – at the same time Lawrence had to say goodbye to his friend and companion, Max, the Staffordshire bull terrier. He had developed debilitating arthritis and had to be put down because of the unbearable pain he suffered. Losing Max was as tough on Lawrence as any animal he lost. Showing his love and devotion to the end, Lawrence held him as the veterinarian administered the "loneliest of all injections."

On another sad note, Mnumzane became violent and aggressive and unmanageable. He was a threat to the people and other animals and had to be taken down. Lawrence tried but couldn't do it himself so he hired two marksmen. It wasn't a happy day for Lawrence but the action he took was necessary.

After working for more than twelve years, Lawrence gets the great news that the Zulu chieftain has agreed to share some of their land with Lawrence for conservation purposes. This addition will make the reserve larger and will accommodate more animals. If they are able to persuade the owners of the adjoining reserve on the other side of the property to open their gates, the resulting tract of land may be large enough to accommodate more elephants and even lions. He pictured the wealth of animals that



could run free and safe on the expanded reserve. He ends his memoir by saying that animals were born to run free and that the only good cage is an empty one.

Vocabulary

quintessential, quandary, aficionado, juggernaut, surreptitiously, reverie, vortex, surreal, desiccated, mercenaries



Important People

Lawrence Anthony

Lawrence Anthony was the proprietor of Thula Thula, a 5,000 acre African game reserve in central Zululand. The reserve had been a hunting reserve prior to his purchasing the property. Lawrence was an animal lover extraordinaire. He refused to move his Rover after a spider weaved a large web from the antenna. He didn't want to disturb the spider's work. When a spitting cobra was coiled and ready to strike one of his dogs inside his house, he carefully moved the poisonous reptile outside with a broom. It was a hard and fast rule that no snakes were to be killed on the property unless someone's life was threatened.

Lawrence grew up in what he termed "old" Africa. It was the days of endless land uninterrupted by modernity. He recalled running barefoot across vast fields in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi. His love and respect for the animals and land of Africa grew from his formative years in the magical continent. After completing his education, he left for a career in the city but the lure of the wild was unrelenting. He always knew he would return. It was in 1990 that he purchased Thula Thula and his dream of returning came true.

Lawrence and his fiancée Françoise enjoyed their life on the reserve and learned about the cycle of life – life and survival and death – which is so pronounced in the natural setting of the African bush. In 1999, their world was forever changed when they agreed to take on a herd of broken elephants. The elephants were on the block and if he didn't take them, they were scheduled to be destroyed. They had become aggressive and dangerous. The reserve owners had already been forced to kill two of the elephants including the matriarch, the leader of the herd. The herd was traumatized and in chaos and needed a home. Lawrence could not say no when the alternative was the killing of the entire herd.

It was a challenge for Lawrence that he readily took on. He knew he had to convey to Nana, the new matriarch, that the herd was safe on the reserve. Lawrence began talking to Nana and never stopped. Through his patience and dedication and love for the animals he was able to settle the herd, make them comfortable in their new home and create the number one draw for the reserve.

Nana

Nana was the matriarch of the elephant herd that Lawrence Anthony agreed to take on at his 5,000 acre African game reserve in central Zululand. Nana had not been the original matriarch of the herd. The herd had lived on another reserve that could no longer handle the elephants had become aggressive and dangerous. The matriarch and her baby had been killed by the owners. The elephants were broken, in chaos and



traumatized. The owners were planning on killing the entire herd because they continued to exhibit violent behavior. As a last ditch effort to save the elephants, an animal manager contacted Lawrence Anthony to see if he would take the herd, free of charge. Anthony knew that taking on a rogue herd of animals was a challenge that most people would reject. However, when he learned that the elephants would all be killed, he couldn't say no. He had loved elephants all his life. He was not about to have the death of a whole herd on his conscious.

As promised, the herd was more than a handful. And, at three to six tons each, the difficulty in controlling them needs no explanation. When the herd arrived, the elephants were placed in a boma, a confined stockade that served as a holding area. The thinking was to calm the animals down before allowing them free run of the reserve. That was the human plan but Nana had a different plan. Even though the fences were electrified to keep the elephants in, she devised a way to break out. The morning following their arrival, Lawrence was hit with the news that the herd was gone! It took two days of tracking to find them. Lawrence and his team had been in a breathless race against local authorities who had sent out armed rangers to take the dangerous herd out. Fortunately, he found the elephants first.

Lawrence recognized that he had to convey to Nana, the matriarch, that the elephants were safe on the reserve and that they could trust humans again. He had no clue how to get this across to Nana so he used the only communication system he knew – he started talking to her. He told her that she was safe, that her herd was safe and that he would protect her. At first she angrily charged him when he tried to approach too close in his car. But he was persistent. He knew he had broken through when Nana approached him on her own and held her trunk out to him. He took her trunk in his hand. She explored his face and torso with her trunk and left. Never again did Nana show any outward signs of hostility or violence and Lawrence never stopped talking to her.

Mnumzane

Mnumzane was the young bull in the reserve's herd. After a young male matures into adolescence, he is ostracized by the rest of the herd. He was not allowed to walk directly with them. He had to stay his distance. Later, when he was fully mature, he rejoined the herd as the patriarch at which time the matriarch, Nana, became subservient to him.

After Mnumzane rejoined the herd, he impregnated one of the young females. Lawrence was always a little leery around him because of his huge size and he didn't become as comfortable with humans as did the mature females, Nana and Frankie. But Mnumzane was never a problem until his behavior began to change. One of the first signs was when a ranger discovered a dead rhino with obvious signs that it had been killed by an elephant. Mnumzane immediately came to mind since Lawrence was sure that the mature females would not have attacked the rhino.



Sadly, once an elephant kills a rhino, it often repeats the act. Lawrence had to find a solution for Mnumzane short of shooting him. Lawrence found Mnumzane and saw the scars and blood of the battle on his hide. The rhino had fought brilliantly because she was protecting her calf. Lawrence began to track Mnumzane each day.

There were more problems with Mnumzane. He charged a ranger who was driving a young couple around the reserve. Mnumzane began approaching more and more vehicles. Lawrence learned that several of the young rangers had been teasing him. They played chicken with him in their vehicles, seeing how close they could get to him before they sped away. These rangers all resigned before Lawrence found out about it. Lawrence attributed his aberrant behavior to the taunting by his staff members.

Lawrence's Land Rover was attacked by Mnumzane when he was driving several visitors around for a sunset safari. The elephant rammed the vehicle turning it over on its top. The marauding elephant left after Lawrence's repeated pleas for him to go. Had he continued with his attack he would have killed everyone in the car. Lawrence tried to kill Mnumzane himself but couldn't do it. He hired two marksmen to do the job.

Poachers took one of the dead elephant's tusks. Ngwenya cut the other tusk off before someone could steal it. He brought it to Lawrence and pointed out the deep crack that ran the length of the tusk. There was an infection in the root of the tusk. It was obvious that Mnumzane had what amounted to an abscessed tooth and had been in terrible pain. Lawrence was devastated. Mnumzane's behavior change was due to an abscessed tooth. He had known he could have had the vet treat him and there probably would have been no need to kill him.

ET

Marion Garai of the Elephant Managers and Owners Associate contacted Lawrence to see if he could take another elephant, a fourteen-year-old female. Her entire family had been shot or sold; she was alone on a large reserve and had been sold to a trophy hunter. Hunting for prey was done up and down the food chain. It was part of nature. However, Lawrence could not relate to killing for the thrill. Besides, hunting game was such a lop-sided affair. No animal alive could compete with high-powered weaponry. Lawrence agreed to take the elephant.

The hunter refused to give up his trophy. Lawrence learned that the man's permit was expired and arranged to have his request for renewal denied. The hunter, therefore, had to relinquish his trophy permit. When the gate on the truck delivering the new elephant opened, she rushed directly to the bush to hide. ET, the name Lawrence chose for her, hid there for several days only coming out to eat at night. She was skittish whenever a human was around. It was obvious that she had been traumatized by the murder of her family. Lawrence talked and sang to her but there was no change. Eventually, the elephant did respond – she came out of the bush angrily charging Lawrence. He backed off to show her that he respected her. He wanted her to rebuild her confidence. He was persistent and stayed around her even though it obviously



irritated her. Lawrence recognized that she was sad and depressed and missed her herd.

The reserve's herd was the only answer. Lawrence led the herd to ET. Nana saw the new elephant and communicated something with her stomach rumblings. As soon as ET spotted Nana she rushed to her. She was the first of her own kind that she'd seen in a year. The two mature females, Nana and Frankie, greeted ET by caressing her with their trunks. Nana signaled that she would accept ET into the herd.

Max, Penny and Bijou

In addition to all their wild animals, Lawrence and Francoise had three pet dogs that they adored. Max was Lawrence's brindle Staffordshire bull terrier. Lawrence took Max everywhere with him. Max didn't realize he was smaller than - and not as strong as - the elephants, rhinos and antelopes. He was a feisty dog who Lawrence had to often restrain from attacking the wild animals. He lived to be fourteen. He was suffering from debilitating arthritis and had to be put down. Lawrence held him while the vet injected the drug that would end his misery.

Penny was one of Francoise's beloved dogs. She was a fearless pure-white bull terrier who romped around the reserve enjoying her freedom and poking her nose in everything. One day she ventured too far and was killed by a croc.

Bijou was Francoise's pampered little Maltese poodle who stayed indoors most of the time. One day she became uncharacteristically aggressive and charged a large nyala bull. The bull rammed her, leaving her lifeless. But she was unharmed and apparently had passed out from fright.

David

David was Lawrence's most trusted aide and reserve manager. He was fearless and never hesitated to volunteer for the most potentially dangerous assignments and tasks. Lawrence was devastated when David announced he was moving to London. He and a British woman who visited the reserve had fallen in love. It didn't go well for David and he wanted his job back. When he learned that Lawrence already hired his replacement David responded that he would come anyway. Lawrence didn't have to pay him.

Francoise

Francoise and Lawrence were together eighteen years before she finally pushed him to marry her. He pointed out that they were legally married under common law statutes. But she wanted more than that and politely "forced" him into a surprise marriage with the help of his mother. Francoise was from France and had lived in Paris all her life. Lawrence was always amazed at how well she had adapted to life in Africa. She loved the animals and the beautiful reserve and raising her vegetable and herb gardens. It



was her idea to build a lodge so that they could have guests for tours of the reserve. Francoise supplied gourmet French food for their guests.

Brendan

Lawrence hired Brendan Whittington Jones, to replace his reserve manager, David, who was leaving to live in London. Brendan had aggressively sought the position and was more than qualified with his degree in zoology and wildlife management and a major in entomology. David couldn't stay away and wanted his job back. David and Brendan readily shared responsibilities and became close friends and associates. The staff called them, "Bravid the clone ranger." Brendan accompanied Lawrence when he went to the Middle East to rescue zoo animals that were caught in the crosshairs of war.

Bheki

Bheki was a Zulu and one of Lawrence's most valuable rangers. He was fearless and the toughest man that Lawrence ever met. He was slightly built with an innocent face but never hesitated to take on the most difficult and dangerous of assignments.

Katy Payne

Kathy Payne was a scientist with the Elephant Listening Project at Cornell University. She discovered the infrasound vibrations that elephants transmit through unique stomach rumblings that can be felt over great distances. It was a great advancement in understanding the communications abilities of elephants.

Nkosi

Nkosi Biyela was a Zulu chief. He was a well-respected leader who understood the world of the Zulu and the world of the white man. He knew that the future of his people was dependent on some degree of modernity. He was forward-thinking and worked for years with Lawrence Anthony in planning a Zulu-based game reserve.

Marion Garai

Marion Garai was a representative of the Elephant Managers and Owners Association (EMOA), a private organization that protects the interest of African elephants. Marion Garai is the person who contacted Lawrence Anthony to offer him the free herd of elephants. She also suggested that perhaps a psychic could help him understand what was making the elephants so aggressive.



Thula

Thula, Nandi's first baby, was born with deformed feet. She was so large in the womb that her feet were folded under so they would fit. Nandi and the other elephants stood around her for days trying to urge the baby to get up. Lawrence distracted the elephants and was able to take the baby to his house where a nursery was made for it. The vet recommended a series of exercises to correct her feet. She did well for a while but then began to fade. Her body was taken to the bush so the elephants could say goodbye.

Peter Hartley

Peter Hartley, the conservation manager of Umfolozi, the adjoining reserve, helped Lawrence track down the elephants when they broke through the gates. He spotted the herd and approached them by foot. Although elephants rarely charge humans, the animals by then were in frenzy. Frankie charged him sending Peter running for his life. He got in his vehicle and sped off just in time. Peter and his rangers felt the herd was dangerous and planned to destroy it. Lawrence pointed out that public support was with the elephants. Initially, the rangers proposed overdosing the adult females, suckling the baby, and sending only the adolescent elephants back to Lawrence. But Lawrence stood firm. He wanted the entire herd back.



Objects/Places

Thula Thula

Lawrence Anthony was the proprietor and operator of Thula Thula a large African game reserve in central Zululand. The reserve was 5,000 acres of “primal Africa.” Thula Thula had been a hunting ranch before Lawrence and his fiancée, Francoise, purchased it. The reserve is the oldest private game reserve in the South African province of KwaZulu-Natal. The reserve had been the exclusive hunting grounds of King Shaka who founded the Zulu nation in the early nineteenth century. The rich wildlife that flocked to the reserve was a lure to hunters from around the world. The moment that Anthony purchased the reserve was the moment that all forms of hunting stopped.

Animal’s Night Vision

Animals are at a distinct advantage over humans in many ways. At night their superiority is intensified by their excellent night vision. A reflective membrane behind the iris of most animals serves as a magnifier of distant light, even starlight. This light reflector is the reason that animals’ eyes will show up in the pitch black night when nothing else can be seen. Among all animals, the night vision of the big cats is supreme which makes them daunting and effective night hunters.

Faction Fight

From time to time as a game reserve operator Lawrence Anthony was a witness to unrest among the locals. This unrest would sometimes lead to violence and gunfire. These disputes were known as faction fights, serious disputes between tribes. The fights are disputes that are bloody and prolonged. Some disputes pass through the generations. A faction fight can be based on the murder of a relative many decades before or on a virulent dispute over land ownership.

Big Five Reserves

Big five reserves are based on the animals that are considered to be the most dangerous to hunt that inhabit the reserves. The most dangerous quarry is considered to be elephants, black rhinos, buffaloes, leopards and lions. These animals can all hold their own with each other with the exception of juvenile elephants that are vulnerable if separated from their mother or the herd.



Ovambos

Many of the guards that Lawrence Anthony hired as part of his reserve staff were Ovambos who were a sub-sect of the Bantus. Many of the Ovambos had fought in the South African Army during the apartheid conflicts. Based on their fighting skills and experience, most are employed in security positions. They are considered brave and able but are shunned by the Zulus who do not socialize with them. Lawrence suspected that some of his Ovambo guards were actually poachers.

Muthi

Muthi is a concoction that Zulu sangomas create from a variety of unusual items. The sangomas, who are also called witch doctors, bless the muthi and provide it to people who are in need of help in liquid form. The person who receives this muthi is to drink it so that the evil spirits are driven away and he will be successful in his pursuit. Hundreds of Zulus sought muthi when the state introduced the national lotto. They had hopes of striking it big with the help of the mystical drink. The drink for the lotto was comprised in part from severed vulture heads.

Snakes

The puff adder was one of the most dangerous snakes on the reserve. It was responsible for more deaths in Africa than another other snake. They blend in with their background and are easy to miss and step on. Another dangerous snake was the black mamba. A mamba killed two adult-sized zebras on another reserve. One mamba had enough venom to kill 40 adult humans. One day one of Lawrence's rangers yelled for him. There was a mamba! The general rule on the reserve was that no snakes were to be killed unless it was a real danger to humans.

The mamba glided into Lawrence's open bedroom window. Lawrence found the snake; it was a spitting cobra. It was facing a mesmerized Bijou. He scooped up Bijou and moved the snake outside with a broom. A few days later a trainee named Brett was bitten by a mamba. They had no serum and the hospital was forty minutes away. Only one fang of the snake bit one of the rangers on the finger. His hands and toes began to tingle, a sign that the venom was traversing his system. Lawrence had him taken to the hospital where he stayed two days while recovering.

The Mozambican spitting cobra is about four feet long. They are considered second only to the black mamba as the continent's most dangerous snake. The bit of this cobra is fatal unless treated immediately. The spit that the cobra spews out is venomous.



Nyala

The Nyala is one of the most beautiful antelopes in Africa. The reserve was home to a large herd of them. Lawrence decided to sell some of the nyala herd because its population was becoming too large for the reserve. The nyala to be sold were captured and placed in the boma. His task was interrupted by Nana who unlatched the fence to the boma and freed all of them. After the last one left, Nana led the herd away. Lawrence was curious about Nana's behavior. He concluded that since she and her herd had been held in the boma she felt compelled to free the nyala. She had rescued them.

Fire

In late winter, the thicker areas of the reserve are burned to make more room for the growing number of animals. Burning fields is a common practice in the reserves. On one occasion, the rangers didn't have to go to the trouble. A Code Red was sounded which meant that a major fire was burning and that every available ranger and laborer had to gather to help. The cause of the fire was unknown initially although it's a tactic poachers use to distract attention from where they want to hunt. The teams set up back-burns in attempt to force the fire backwards. The animals headed for the croc pools, despite the danger that was inherent in that water. The elephants, zebras, antelopes and other animals all waded in the pool knowing that the fire couldn't reach them. A family of baboons burned up in that particular fire.

Rhinos

Lawrence brought three white rhinos onto the reserve. One large female was still drugged from the capture and ambled toward the elephants which could spell disaster if the new arrivals got too close to them. The rangers diverted her but Mnumzane caught her scent and began trailing her. To keep the elephants away from her, the rangers dropped protein-rich pellets on the ground in a food trail from the slow moving Rover to lure the herd away. Finally, Mnumzane tried the pellets and forgot about the rhinos. But Mnumzane didn't forget about them for long. He wound up killing a female adult who had a young calf. Rhino and elephant tusks are both considered prizes by the poachers.



Themes

Conservation

If there is one theme that emerges throughout the story of “The Elephant Whisperer” it’s that of conservation. Lawrence Anthony loves animals of all description including everything from magnificent elephants and glorious lions to deadly snakes and tiny spiders. That he agreed to take on a herd of huge and agitated elephants demonstrates his undying love for animals and his dedication to their preservation.

Anthony touts his conservationist creds and recognizes that he was in a unique position to apply more than lip service to his cause. He admits that he was extremely lucky to acquire Thula Thula his 5,000 acre game reserve in central Zululand, South Africa. Before he purchased the reserve, it had been a game hunting reserve. Of course, when he took it over, there was no more hunting. He issued strict orders that no animals – including snakes – be killed on the reserve unless a person or another animal was at great risk.

Thula Thula is a natural habitat of elephants, leopards, white rhinos, Cape buffaloes, hyenas, zebras, wildebeests, giraffes, crocodiles and many other species most of which are at some level of extinction or risk of extinction. Through his many experiences with animals of the wild, he has come to understand life on another level. He knows that life, survival and death are all a part of the cycle that all animals, including humans, are part of from the moment of birth. His vulture population was as important as any animal group on the reserve to further the preservation of life.

Thula Thula earned a reputation of being one of the top conservation reserves in South Africa with the wondrous indigenous Zululand wildlife that resided there. Anthony worked tenaciously with the local Zulu chieftain to educate the Zulus about how conservation would benefit not only the animals but the people and their economy as well. After twelve years of advocating a Zulu-based reserve, there was finally agreement with the Zulu leaders that they would share some of their land to join with Thula Thula in order to create a expanded reserve for a large number of endangered animals that would be a safe haven for them from hunters and poachers.

Poaching

Poaching was a problem that dogged Lawrence Anthony during all his time as a reserve owner. The echoing of powerful rifle fire was a sound that he was wired to react to. Poachers! Poachers had been targeting Thula Thula, the game reserve in central Zululand that Lawrence and his fiancée had bought the year before. The local Zulus claimed they were not involved in any of the poaching incidents.

During one particularly ugly occurrence, Lawrence’s workers on his western boundary were shot at by poachers. One had been shot in the face. To safeguard his staff, he



ordered security guards to protect the other laborers. Since there were obvious signs of poaching Lawrence sent two of his toughest Zulu rangers to track the shooter. They found the shooter and recognized him as a hunter from another Zulu village. The police were called in and arrested the man.

The poachers were very bold and aggressive criminals. They were hired by others, often times village chiefs, to poach the animals for their horns, tusks and pelts. After the trackers found the poacher who had been shooting at Lawrence's men, he had the temerity to complain about the electric fence that had been set up to confine the elephants. It was going to limit his access to the reserve. This man turned out to be a minor player. Lawrence was aware of a larger, more nefarious group of poachers that presented a bigger threat to the animals and to the people of the reserve.

The poachers were a crafty bunch. They would place a shooter at one end of the huge reserve and have him fire his rifle. But it often turned out to be a ruse. While the rangers rushed to the place where the gunfire was coming from, the poachers would be at the far end of the reserve killing and hauling the beautiful animals away. One of Africa's most beautiful antelopes, the nyala, was often the victim of poachers on the reserve.

Zulu Witchcraft

The carcass of a wildebeest and the decapitated bodies of two vultures were found on the reserve. It was vital to have a healthy population of vultures on the reserve. They were a part of nature's process. The heads of vultures had become a commodity among the sangomas. The recently introduced national lottery sent hundreds of people to the sangomas who provided them with Lotto muthi that was made from dried vulture brains. The vultures were being poached to near extinction and the sangomas were growing wealthy.

One of the biggest worries on the reserve was the spread of disease which would wipe out all the animals. Lawrence and his rangers confirmed that the wildebeest did not appear to have been sick before his death. Lawrence suspected that the animal was poisoned. Perhaps the sangomas had the wildebeest poisoned so it would draw the vultures. They had to burn the carcasses so that jackals and hyenas wouldn't eat them and die from the poison, too.

The poachers who were decapitating the vultures were caught. Lawrence devised a plan to teach them a lesson by using their fear of the occult against them. Lawrence had one of his rangers pose as a sangoma. The poachers were marched into the bush and blindfolded. They were led back to the wildebeest carcass that now had a crocodile skull and baboon skull on either side of it. The men were horrified. The skulls were evil symbols used by the sangomas. The frightened poachers were told that the vultures were the sangoma's children and that some believed that he flew with the vultures. They were so terrified that they turned over their weapons and confessed to their actions. By the time the ruse was over, Lawrence was certain they'd never try to kill his vultures again.



Lawrence recognized that the Zulus were highly spiritual and superstitious. One evening when bringing staff members home, one of the women protested when Lawrence took the river road. The tagati lived in a big rock in the cliff at the river. The tagati was an evil spirit that the Zulus were not to have anything to do with. Later, when he asked the sangoma, or diviner, of the tribe about the tagati, he was warned to stay away from it, too. He visited the rock and felt nothing until one night. He was driving on the river road and felt an uncomfortable sensation. He looked up and he was right under the rock. He felt the presence of something malevolent. Later, he and David returned. David was spooked by the area, too. The sangoma were fortune tellers, too. Francoise thought some of the visitors might like to have their fortune told. It was a happy arrangement. The guests loved meeting with the exotic sangoma and the sangoma was making good money.

There was a more sinister side to Zulu witchcraft. The tribe would burn the houses of those identified as witches and wizards. In the old days they killed them. There was no proof needed; everyone just knew that a person was a witch or wizard.

The Royal Zulu Project

Nkosi Nkanyiso Biyela, a local Zulu chieftain, worked with Lawrence Anthony for twelve years on the Royal Zulu Project. The focus of the project was to involve tribes in conservation – something that most Zulus believed was a white man's idea and a white man's problem. The project which would encompass more Zulu land was not popular among the Zulus. The cattlemen who believed that the reserve would end their livelihood because their access to land would be limited were the most against it. The Nkosi had asked Lawrence to come and speak before the tribal meeting to educate them about conservation and the plusses it would mean for their people and their economy. Lawrence didn't make much progress but he never gave up hope.

When the Nkosi died, the tribe was in deep mourning, the sounds of their wailing could be heard in the distance. Lawrence knew he would be operating with a skeleton crew since the mourning and rituals would last for weeks and many of his workers were Zulus. He feared that the Royal Zulu Project would be dropped with the passing of the chieftain. Things did not look good for the expanded reserve that he had envisioned.

Soon after Nkosi's heir took over the tribe, there was a violent faction fight broke out. Such tribal disputes were bloody and brutal. Some lasted for decades. Later Lawrence learned that he was in the middle of the dispute. The tribesmen were still debating raising cattle versus the game-reserve project. The new king was Nkosi's son. Those opposed to the reserve, were filling his head with lies about Lawrence. The most blatant lie was that Lawrence was supplying enemies of the tribe with guns and ammunition. Lawrence recruited the help of Zulu King Gideon, Nkosi's brother, to smooth things over with the new leader.

The new king asked Lawrence to come and speak at a tribal meeting just as his father had. Lawrence learned that some of the cattlemen were trying to reclaim Thula Thula



which had originally belonged to the Zulus. Lawrence worked on his speech. If he didn't get the support of the Zulus, it could spell the end of the reserve. He recruited a local priest to be his translator at the meeting so that there were no misunderstandings. The priest performed a ritual blessing for Lawrence prior to the meeting. He concocted a drink called muthi and told Lawrence to drink it at the meeting so that the tribesmen could see him drink it. Everything would go well then.

There was a heavy police presence at the meeting. When Lawrence parked his Rover, a policeman warned him that the tribesmen were agitated. But he insisted on speaking as promised. After he was introduced to the tribe, Lawrence stood making sure he held the muthi bottle where everyone could see it. He was making his case for a fair hearing when several in the crowd started screaming "Apologize!" It was a trap. If he apologized he would be finished. He was jeered when he told the tribe that he cannot apologize because he'd done nothing wrong. He told them he would be giving up his manhood if he lied. He assured the tribe that he was not harboring their enemies nor supplying them with firearms. Any enemies who hid on Thula did so without Lawrence's permission or knowledge.

One man shouted that he should take his family and leave. They were white and the tribe didn't want them there. He reminded the tribe that he had fought to end apartheid. He accused the man of wanting to bring it back. The young king reminded the tribe that Lawrence was not on trial and that he was a good friend of his father's. He dismissed the matter. The cattlemen had been defeated. The young Nkosi had called their bluff. The Royal Zulu Project was on again.

Elephants

Lawrence Anthony learned firsthand the intelligence and characteristics of elephants after he was given a herd of elephants that were unwanted by the previous owners. They had become violent and dangerous. When an animal that weighs in at between three and six tons is angry and violent, humans have absolutely no control over their behavior. The previous owners were planning on killed the animals because they couldn't deal with them. It is a common and accepted practice that rogue elephants on a rampage be killed. The size disparity between man and elephant, it is thought, offers no alternative.

Lawrence was not naive when he took on the herd. He knew it would be the challenge of his life and that there was no guarantee that he wouldn't wind up with the same conclusion as the former owners. He immediately sensed that he had to get it across to the matriarch, Nana, that the herd was not in danger in their new home. He began talking to her. Although initially she rejected any approaches he made, his unrelenting talking to her began to soothe her. After months of dedicated work with her, he won her over and she conveyed to the rest of the herd that Lawrence was not a threat.

Elephants communicate in several ways. They use their trunks to explore and learn. They also use it as a symbol of friendship. When Nana reached out to Lawrence when



her trunk and he took it in his hands, he knew he had her. She was never violent towards him again after that incident. At times he felt vibrations coming from her and sensed that she was trying to reach him. These vibrations were stomach rumblings which elephants use as a communications tool. Scientists have learned that elephants transmit infrasound vibrations through ultra-low frequencies from their stomachs that send messages to other herd members. It is a similar communications system that whales use. Elephants that are agitated stomp their feet and flare their large ears out to the side.

Lawrence learned a lot from his elephants. He saw the outstanding mothering skills of the females, the loyalty that the elephants had for one another, their survival instincts and their astonishing level of intelligence.



Styles

Structure

“The Elephant Whisperer” by Lawrence Anthony and Graham Spence is a memoir of Anthony’s experience in taking on a rogue herd of elephants at his African game reserve. The book is comprised of forty-two chapters. In the brief prologue preceding the first chapter, Anthony establishes the premise of the story and describes the pristine bush of his reserve.

In the first chapter, Anthony introduces the reader to one of the main problems that plague conservationists in Africa – poaching. The chapter also describes the offer that Lawrence received to take on a troublesome herd of elephants which is the heart of the story and which is told in chronological order. The succeeding chapters describe Anthony’s struggle to deal with his three to six-ton new arrivals who were not happy to be at the reserve. Anthony describes how, through just talking gently to the matriarch, he was able to convey to them that they would be safe and that they could trust humans again.

There are other story lines that describe more problems with poachers and local Zulus who felt that the reserve was their land. There were plenty of crises as well – floods and fires and rogue lions that broke into the reserve and frightened man and beast alike.

The book is followed by an acknowledgments section as well as a section about the authors’ other books.

Perspective

“The Elephant Whisperer” by Lawrence Anthony with Graham Spence is the story of Anthony’s experience as an owner and operator of an African game reserve. The story is written in the first person and is narrated by Anthony. The main focus of the story is a challenge he was faced with in 1999 when he was offered a herd of elephants. He had to wrestle with the pros and cons. He loved elephants but this particular herd of elephants had been violent and aggressive at their current reserve to such a degree that two of the elephants had been shot and killed by the owners. The remaining elephants were traumatized by the incident and were set to be taken down as well unless Anthony agreed to take them.

Anthony loved elephants too much to allow them to die virtually at his feet. He took the rogue elephants and most of the story is about his struggle to help them get acclimated to their new surroundings. Anthony had a real problem on his hands when the elephants figured out how to break out of the electric fences that confined them. Just out of instinct they headed for their native land. But there’s only one thing that happens when a herd of aggressive elephants are out on the loose. The territory rangers were hunting them



down with their elephant guns at the same time Anthony was trying to track them down to save them.

Once Anthony was able to rescue them this second time, he realized that he had to let the elephants, particularly the matriarch Nana, know that they could trust humans again. He began to cautiously approach them, hang around where they were and talk to them. There were many eerie times when Nana seemed to know what he was saying.

Anthony also provides colorful descriptions of the other animals on the reserve along with problems facing him that ranged everywhere from deadly black mambas, crocs, floods and lions that unexpectedly visited the reserve.

Tone

“The Elephant Whisperer” by Lawrence Anthony and Graham Spence is a memoir of Anthony’s experience as a game reserve proprietor and operator in Zululand in Africa. The story focuses in particular on his challenge in bringing in a broken herd of elephants that were agitated and aggressive and unwanted.

The tone throughout the narrative as told by Anthony himself is one of great love and respect for the animals he protected. Lawrence has no boundaries or parameters for his love of the life on the reserve – from the huge elephants to the deadly black mamba and even to the tiny spider that made a web on his antenna that he refused to disturb.

When he is first approached about taking the herd of elephants from another reserve that could no longer deal with their aggression and violent behavior, his first instinct was to say no because he knew he would be getting the challenge of his life. But his love for animals trumped that decision rather quickly. As soon as he heard that the entire herd would be killed if he didn’t take him, he was backed against the wall and had no choice. He had loved elephants all his life. He wasn’t about to be responsible for the death of an entire herd of them.

Lawrence’s despair and pain when an animal died or had to be taken down comes through the pages of “The Elephant Whisperer.” He ends his story with words that capture his fundamental feelings for animals: “The only good cage is an empty cage.”



Quotes

As any game ranger in Africa knows, professional poachers will shoot first and shoot to kill.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 1 paragraph 9)

Importance: The author captures how ruthless the poachers he was constantly targeted by were.

The Zulus who live close to the land have a saying that if it rains on an inaugural occasion, that event will be blessed. For those in step with the natural worlds, rain is life. That day it didn't just rain, it bucketed.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 3 paragraph 12)

Importance: Lawrence describes the deluge of rain on the day the elephants were being brought to Thula Thula. He hoped the Zulus were right and that it was a good omen.

... this was a dangerous, unsettled herd. A rogue herd. The risk of letting them remain in an area with rural settlements was too high. In conservation 'speak', that meant only one thing. The rangers were going to destroy the herd.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 5 paragraph 10)

Importance: Just after the herd arrived at Thula Thula, they escaped and were rampaging the surrounding areas. They were considered dangerous and a risk to the people and property. The rangers on the reserve where the elephants fled decided to destroy the elephants. Lawrence was of course against the action and was faced with the challenge of making the case that the elephants were salvageable.

Living rough in the wilderness is a salve for the soul. Ancient instincts awaken; forgotten skills are relearned, consciousness is sharpened and life thrums at a richer tempo.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 9 paragraph 2)

Importance: Lawrence was inspired by the wilderness. He was at one with nature during the time he lived in the boma with the elephants.

No matter how heart-wrenching the situation, we never interfered with nature. Brutal as the food chain is, that's the balance of life in the wild. Terrible as the tragedy was for the nyala mother, the eagles also had to feed their young.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 13 paragraph 26)

Importance: Lawrence had just described a martial eagle taking a nyala fawn. The mother fawn was able to hold onto the fawn's foot and pull it away from the eagle. But the fawn was dead. Lawrence explains that a conservationist doesn't interrupt nature's plan. He just makes sure that no one else does either.



An elephant charge is accompanied by the sound of screaming demons. Except perhaps for the prospect of imminent hanging, there is nothing that serves to concentrate the mind more wonderfully.”

-- Clive Walker (chapter 14 paragraph 21)

Importance: This was author and famed African game ranger who included this description of being charged by an elephant in his book, “Signs of the Wild.”

To think that no so long ago I was begging for their lives while the Parks Board issued elephant rifles to their rangers with ‘shoot on sight’ instructions. Now I was trying to keep them out of our living room.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 18 paragraph 1)

Importance: Lawrence and Francoise get a late night visit from Nana and the other elephants. He woke from a commotion and found that she was eating his thatched roof. She offered her tusk to him and he reached out with his hand. He figures a few months before given the same scenario he would have been a dead man. At this point, Nana had grown to know and trust Lawrence.

As for a search, they would never find the body and the perpetrators would have long since disappeared into the surrounding huts and hills. Such is Africa, the flawed, beautiful, magnificent, beguiling, mystical, unique, life-changing continent... its seductive charm and charisma, its ancient wisdom so often stained by unfathomable spasms of blood.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 21 paragraph 71)

Importance: Lawrence has just stopped a group of men who is dragging an accused murderer/rapist to the river to kill him. They don’t listen to Lawrence’s pleas to go to the police because they don’t trust the police. In this passage, Lawrence juxtaposes the splendor of Africa against the brutal oppression that is just as much a part of the Dark Continent.

I had at last grasped that the essence of communicating with any animal, from a pet dog to a wild elephant, is not so much the reach as the acknowledgement. It’s the acknowledgement that does it. In the animal kingdom communication is a two-way flow, just as it is everywhere else. If you are not signaling to them that their communication has arrived with you then there can be no communication.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 23 paragraph 38)

Importance: When Lawrence was able to get close enough to Nana, the herd’s matriarch, he realized that he had to signal to her when he sensed that she was trying to communicate with him.

Every wild thing is in tune with its surroundings, awake to its fate and in absolute harmony with the planet. Their attention is focused totally outwards. Humans, on the other hand, tend to focus introspectively on their own lives too often, brooding and magnifying problems that the animal kingdom would not waste a millisecond of energy



on.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 28 paragraph 10)

Importance: The author captures one of the major differences between man and beast and what life means to each of them.

The news of my strange communication with elephants, coupled with my refusal to allow anyone to kill even a deadly snake or scorpion had spread, and many in the village considered me to be somehow mysteriously connected to the animals. I mean, what sort of person would shun normal life and live in the African bush preferring to commune with elephants, rather than his own kind?”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 30 paragraph 58)

Importance: Lawrence points out why the Zulus were at least initially suspicious of Lawrence and his choice to live in Africa and leave civilization behind him.

Life and death go hand in glove. Death is cyclical witnessed more in the natural order of the wild than anywhere else.”

-- Lawrence Anthony (chapter 37 paragraph 31)

Importance: Operating the reserve, Lawrence saw the wisdom of the words on a continual basis. Death follows life but life also follows death.



Topics for Discussion

1

Why did the former owners of the elephant herd want to get rid of the elephants? What would have happened to them if Lawrence hadn't taken them?

2

Why were the elephants confined to a small area known as a boma when they first arrived at Thula Thula? How did the elephants break out of the reserve?

3

Describe the ways in which elephants use their trunks. How was Nana's trunk important in the relationship between her and Lawrence?

4

How did Lawrence determine that the Ovambos were actually poachers? Why didn't the poachers what the elephants on the reserve?

5

What animals began to emerge into the open after the poachers were disposed of? What surprise danger did David face when he took the tractor out at night?

6

What communications skill did Nana exhibit that was felt even at far distances away? What protection did Francoise have when Frankie was charging her and Lawrence?

7

How did Nana and Frankie interact with Lawrence when they had their babies? How did he reciprocate a year later?



8

Why were Nana and Frankie upset after the storm and the flooding and what behavior did they display? Why was it urgent that Mandla be returned to the herd after the flood?

9

When Lawrence spoke at the tribal meeting, what was the topic of his talk? What were some of the people upset with him about and what did they accuse him of?

10

Why did Lawrence and Brendan travel to the middle east? What was the mission of The Earth Organization which Lawrence established?