

**HOW TO SAVE**

# A BABY ELEPHANT



**In the wilds of Africa,**



**a baby elephant was alone and starving—and attacked by a lion.**



**This is the extraordinary story of the people who were determined to keep her alive**



**and send her back into the wild.**

**By Justin O'Neill**

**T**he baby elephant was lying in the bushes, scared, starving, and struggling to breathe.

Until just a few days before, she had been with her mother, roaming through the sweeping grasslands of Tsavo National Park in the African country of Kenya. It's a beautiful place where zebras and giraffes roam among ancient baobab trees, where hippos splash in rivers, and herds of elephants and buffalo shake the ground with their thunderous footsteps,

Baby elephant: Martin Harvey/Alamy. Map: iStockphoto.com; Lion: iStockphoto.com; Feeding elephant: Boris Reessler/DPA/ZumaPress; Baobab tree: iStockphoto.com

**UP CLOSE** **Humans and Animals**  
 Humans can be both harmful and helpful to animals in the wild. Think about this as you read the article and the poem.

**LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 9 WORDS IN BOLD**

kicking up enormous clouds of dust. Elephants thrive here—more than 10,000 wander in the 7,850-square-mile reserve and the surrounding areas. The baby and her mother had lived within the security of their herd, a large and noisy extended family of relatives. Some had been together for decades.

But then tragedy struck.

The baby's mother was killed, most likely by **poachers**—hunters who illegally kill animals that are endangered or protected. Most poachers are after the elephants' ivory tusks, which are used to make statues, jewelry, and other prized objects. The sale of ivory is banned in most countries. But that doesn't stop these hunters, who can make thousands of dollars selling tusks in illegal markets.

An elephant with a healthy set of tusks will be hunted down and killed. The poachers will chop off their tusks. If that elephant is a mother with a baby, the baby will usually die as well. That is because without a mother, a baby is doomed in the wild. Elephant babies need their



The medical care and affection Ishanga received from humans saved her life.



mothers' milk for the first two years of their lives, and a mother elephant can feed only one baby at a time. The other elephants in the herd are powerless to help. Eventually, they have to leave orphans behind.

However this particular baby was orphaned, she likely wandered on her own for days, exhausted and starving, until she finally collapsed, helpless as death closed in.

### Surprise Attack

On Wednesday, November 17, 2010, an antipoaching team was on patrol, removing “snares,” deadly wire traps that poachers set throughout the park. In a stroke of luck, a member of the team spotted the baby and rushed to help.

Suddenly, a lion sprang from the bushes. Snarling at

on her neck. And just off in the distance, a group of hungry lions was circling.

### Almost Certain Death

About 300 miles north of Tsavo is a place that helps baby elephants. Dame Daphne Sheldrick founded the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust 30 years ago. She named it in honor of her late husband, an expert on Kenyan wildlife. Horrified by poaching, Dame Daphne created a place where orphaned baby elephants could be safe from almost certain death in the wilderness. Over the years, the orphanage has raised 130 elephants and successfully released them back into the wild.

The baby's rescuers, who work for the Trust, were determined to get her to the orphanage. It was her only chance of survival. They carried her by jeep across rocky dirt roads to an airstrip and waited for the rescue plane to arrive. The baby's condition continued to worsen.

After a tense wait and an hour-long plane ride, they made it to the orphanage. The medical staff worked frantically to treat her wound. She was scared and wild. She **bucked** her head, screamed, and wouldn't let any humans get near her, refusing to eat or drink.

Through the night, the staff treated her with modern medicine and old-fashioned loving care. They soothed her with gentle strokes and calm voices. They named her Ishanga, after the area where she was found. Elephants are highly emotional creatures that **crave** attention and affection just as humans do. At the orphanage, human “keepers” provide constant companionship to the baby elephants, even



No one can know for sure how long Ishanga was alone before she was finally rescued.



The baby elephants take daily walks in the wilds surrounding the orphanage.

the humans, the lion **pounced** on the exhausted elephant and clamped its mouth around her neck.

In the **chaos**, a park ranger working with the team managed to pull out his gun and fire shots in the air. The startled lion released the baby and backed away.

Now the weakened baby had a **grave** wound—blood dripped from the gruesome gash

(4) The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

sleeping by their sides.

When Ishanga finally did guzzle a bottle of milk, she passed out and started shivering uncontrollably. The keepers' hearts pounded as they huddled around her, covered her with blankets, and worked to revive her. They feared the worst.

Was it too late?

## A New Home

After two hours of intense medical care, Ishanga awoke and slowly struggled to her feet. Two keepers and a veterinarian had been with her all night. They were thrilled and relieved that she seemed to be recovering.

The next day, though Ishanga remained weak, her keepers introduced her to some of the other 14 young elephants living at the orphanage.


The keepers stood back as the other elephants extended their trunks in friendly greetings—an elephant's way of shaking hands. Elephants communicate with each other through touch and sounds—**intertwining** trunks and speaking through grunts, barks, and

shrieks. The older elephants led Ishanga around, giving her a tour of her new home. They showed her the dormitories where they sleep; the field where they run, wrestle, and play soccer; the mud pit where they bathe; and the dining area where they drink from gigantic baby bottles.

Over the past year, Ishanga's wounds have healed. She has made many friends. She is still very thin. Occasionally, she still has

nightmares that keep her up at night. But she is also one of the most playful babies at the orphanage. This big eater knows the feeding schedule by heart and is always first in line, often causing trouble by climbing up into the wheelbarrow the keepers use to carry the milk.

It'll be up to Ishanga to decide when she's ready to leave the orphanage. Returning to the wild is a long process that can take more than 10 years. For now, she is in no rush to leave this extraordinary community of elephants and humans.

Ishanga has a long, happy life ahead of her. 



Ishanga,  
November  
2011

Learn more at  
[www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org](http://www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org)

## WRITE TO WIN

What does the poem "Same Hands" say about the way humans treat elephants? Use details from the story of Ishanga to support your ideas. Write your answer in a well-organized paragraph. Send it to "Elephant Contest" by May 15, 2012. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *The One and Only Ivan* by Katherine Applegate. See page 2 for details.

GET THIS  
ACTIVITY  
ONLINE

The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

Martin Harvey/Corbis

## Storyworks Across Genres: Poetry

# Same Hands

By Irene Latham

### Same hands

that snatch  
elephants' lands

also hatch hope  
by creating reserves  
and preserves.

### Same hands

that raid  
and trade tusks

also crusade  
for laws to aid  
elephants' freedom.

### Same hands

that set the traps  
and snares

also repair bones,  
mend memories  
and give intensive care.

### Same hands

that bloody  
the knife

also deliver orphans  
to unexpected  
life.