Throughout time, elephants have had a curious effect on people, creating a sense of reverence and respect. Of course, their massive size and immense strength is enough to demand it. But elephants and humans have much in common, including their intelligence.

An elephant’s lifespan can span upwards of 65 years in the wild, which matches that of humans and has a parallel rate of development, reaching sexual maturity in the early teen years. Both people and elephants have complex social lives and family structures.

Both love, protect, and nurture family members and educate the young with the skills and knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive. Like humans, elephants are not born with the knowledge they need to survive.

Elephants live within tight-knit family units, or breeding groups, that may form part of larger kinship groups. The matriarch is usually the oldest and largest, while her immediate family herd is comprised of daughters, nieces, sisters and the young male counterparts.

Juvenile males will begin spending less and less time with their immediate family as they enter their teen years. They eventually leave their family herd to bond with other males living among a loose group of friends, or bachelor herds, that may travel for years together, break, regroup and occasionally visit their own family from time to time.

Within both types of elephant groups there is a hierarchy and they show respect to their elders. They can be devastated by the death of one of their members.

Elephants can reason and display emotions, including joy, playfulness, grief and mourning.

In addition, elephants are able to learn new facts and behaviours. They mimic sounds that they hear, can self-medicate, play with a sense of humour, perform artistic activities, use tools and display compassion and altruistic behaviours. They have been known to come to the aid of other species in distress, including humans.

Elephants even display self-recognition and recognize themselves in a mirror, which is extremely rare in the animal kingdom.

Scientifically, this can be explained by the fact that the elephant’s brain is similar to that of humans in terms of structure and complexity. It is specially designed to accommodate life-long learning. It has as many neurons and synapses as a human’s, the volume of their cerebral cortex (used for cognitive processing) exceeds that of any primate species.

The hippocampus (linked to emotion and memory) is proportionally larger than that of humans or other known intelligent species, and is highly convoluted, which is associated with complex intelligence. This possibly explains why elephants suffer from psychological flashbacks and the equivalent of post-traumatic stress disorder.

For me, as someone who has spent many hours, many days and many years monitoring and documenting elephants, the physiological facts only confirm what I believe can easily be observed.

Conservation issues concerning elephants are multifaceted and complex. I believe if more people were able to understand elephants as beings, they might appreciate elephants’ similarities to their own lives. Which would, I hope, create respect and consideration for efforts to help both species share land and resources.

If you encounter an elephant along the roadside, show respect for its space and appreciate the moment together. If you aren’t paying attention and don’t choose your behaviour carefully, it will. Remember this, truly, an elephant never forgets!

### Birdlife Botswana Conducts Water Bird Count in CNP

By Bonnie Fairbanks

In July, the Kasane branch of Birdlife Botswana participated in the annual water bird count in Chobe National Park to assess changes in water bird populations. Birdlife branches throughout Botswana participated in these counts at major water sources, so the nationwide health of our water bird populations can be tracked.

Since the Chobe River is an essential habitat for many water birds, and waterbird counts can be an indicator for problems in the river, this bird count can raise a red flag for changes in the river that not only affect birds but humans too.

We divided into 4 teams of 3-6 people, with each team driving down the riverfront in the park between the old park gate to Nogama, counting every water bird seen. We also noted any human activities such as fishing nets in the water, which will help us to determine if human activities are changing the way water birds use the river. We had a very diverse group of volunteers, from tourism operators to the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, as well as interested individuals from the community.

We counted a total of 10,976 birds this season. This year’s most sighted bird was the white-faced duck, with a count of 3,415. We were interested to see that many birds seem to have moved from their usual resting and roosting places within the park to the rapids down river near Mowana Lodge and the Sebela Community Trust. The rapids have not been included in counts in the past due to the difficulty in accessing them for much of the year. Since the entire length of the rapids cannot be accessed, we have decided to begin doing counts there from the same points year after year, to see if birds are perhaps remaining constant in number but changing their habitat use between the park and the rapids.