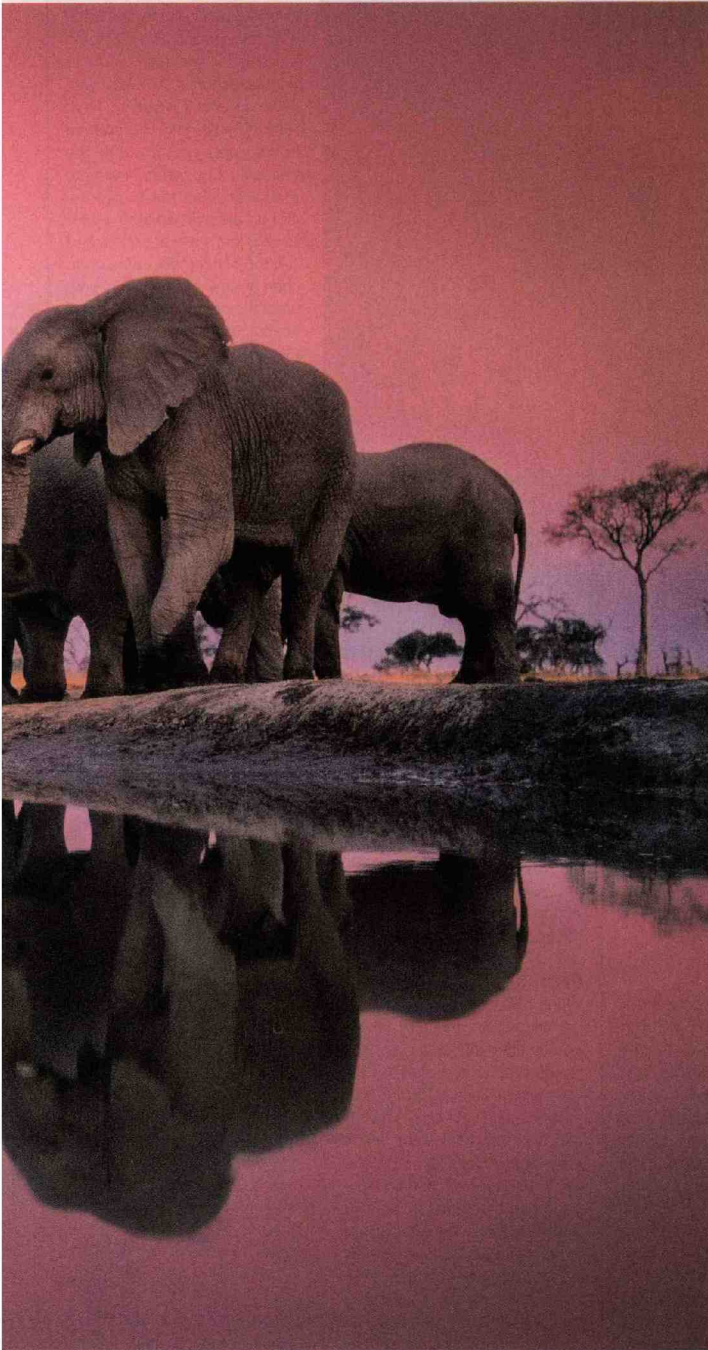


Elephant Reflections

world view



[By Frans Lanting]



Frans Lanting and Chris Eckstrom are leading an exclusive photo safari in Botswana in the spring of 2014. Check www.lanting.com/phototours for details.

One memorable evening during Botswana's long dry season, I waded into a water hole to capture a perfect reflection of a gathering of elephants at twilight with a full moon suspended in a luminous pink sky. The image became a symbol for the primeval qualities of Botswana's wilderness and the grandeur of elephants when it was published as the cover of my book, *Okavango: Africa's Last Eden*. For a new, expanded edition of this book, which had been out of print for years, I had an occasion to reflect on what has transpired since I made this image more than 20 years ago.

In the past two decades the pressures on Africa's wilderness and wildlife have increased dramatically, yet the Okavango Delta is still largely intact, and northern Botswana now shelters the largest population of elephants in the world—well over 100,000. Traditionally, elephants traveled across southern Africa at will, roaming seasonally over great distances. We now know that they follow routes passed on from one generation to the next and use subsonic communications that carry for many miles between distant herds. But today elephants have to navigate ever more through human landscapes, and that causes conflicts for both local communities and elephant societies.

A recent agreement between five African nations aims to provide for the space these wandering giants require. Known as KAZA, for the Okavango and Zambezi watersheds, it creates a transnational conservation zone that connects protected areas from Namibia east to Zambia and Zimbabwe and from Botswana north to Angola. KAZA covers more than 100,000 square miles, and one of its goals is to reconcile the needs of people and elephants.

While our appreciation for elephants has grown since I crouched by that water hole at dusk, so have the challenges associated with coexisting with them. But in southern Africa, at least for the moment, the horizons are expanding and so are the opportunities for continued reflections.

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