

Fun Facts Friday: Elephant Eyelashes

Elephant eyelashes are long, thick, and bristle-like, and they can reach up to 5 inches in length. Like other mammal eyelashes, they are made of keratin. They are especially noticeable along the upper lid, where they help form a physical barrier around the eye.

Their main job is protection. The lashes help shield the eyes from dust, debris, insects, vegetation, and bright sunlight, all common hazards for elephants moving through savannas, forests, and brush. They can also help trigger the blink reflex when something comes too close to the eye.

Research on mammal lash geometry has found that eyelashes can reduce airflow across the eye surface, thereby limiting evaporation and helping keep airborne particles away from the cornea.

Eyelashes are only the first line of defense. Elephants also have a nictitating membrane, a translucent third eyelid that moves horizontally across the eye during feeding, bathing, and dusting. It provides an additional layer of protection, helping keep the eye moist without blocking vision entirely.

Photo: Tarra's fabulous lashes

