

Fun Facts Friday: In Honor of Father's Day, The Mature Wild Bull

Male elephants are born into a female-led world but leave their birth family during puberty, around age 12 to 15, typically joining loosely organized groups of other young males.

For a long time, bulls were considered largely solitary after dispersal. Long-term research tells a different story. Studies at Namibia's Mushara waterhole have documented that male elephants form complex social networks with their own rituals, hierarchies, and bonds, some of which last for years.

One striking behavior is the "let's go" rumble. When a bonded group of males prepares to leave a waterhole, one bull may emit a deep, low rumble. Other males respond in sequence before the group moves together. This coordinated vocalization had previously been documented in female-led family groups.

Older bulls have also been observed allowing younger males to explore their faces and tusks with their trunks and inviting them to travel alongside them. When mature, socially integrated bulls are present, aggression decreases, and affiliative behavior increases. The mature bull shapes the next generation, quietly, powerfully, and with purpose.

Photo: Male African elephants gathered at the Boteti River in Botswana

