

## **Fun Facts Friday: Elephants that Mine**

On Mount Elgon in Kenya, African savanna elephants enter dark caves to mine mineral-rich rock. Field studies describe them as the only elephants known to excavate minerals underground. They use their tusks to dig into the cave walls, break off pieces, and ingest them. In Kitum Cave, they have ventured about 150 meters (nearly 500 feet) inside, leaving visible tusk marks.

The rock contains sodium, calcium, and magnesium. A 1987 study suggests the minerals may supplement their diets because the surrounding landscape is low in some essential minerals. Researchers observed elephants visiting alone or in groups of up to 19. Most visits began around dusk, and some lasted up to six hours.

At Elephant Refuge North America (ERNA), Bo, Tarra, and Mundi also seek out minerals, using the loose trace mineral salts available at every watering station each day.

In April 2026, the Mount Elgon Foundation reported elephant mining in more than 55 caves on the Kenyan side. Other wildlife also visits the caves for minerals. Poaching once devastated Mount Elgon's elephants. Despite signs of recovery, the Foundation estimates that about 560 remain, threatened by deforestation and human-elephant conflict.

Photo: A herd of elephants, deep in Kitum Cave, Kenya



