

Tuli Elephants The World's Elephant Experts Speak Out

Photos and Statement by James Balog, Wildlife Photographer

The elephant families on the day before they were set upon by wildlife traders in helicopters and brutally separated.

James Balog, an internationally known wildlife photographer, happened to be on the scene in Botswana the day before the capture took place. The next day, alerted by the elephants' distress calls, he could only watch in horror as the babies and mothers were attacked. *Photos ©: 1998 James Balog. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.*



Statement of James Balog On the Trapping of Elephant Calves in Botswana

26 October 1998

I entered the Tuli Block on July 28th, the same day as Mr. Ghiazza's trapping crew. That afternoon, I photographed an elephant family who lived in the precise trapping area. The family consisted of older females, adolescents and nursing infants. All the elephants appeared very healthy, well-nourished and in fine condition. When I later discovered that this family was probably going to be trapped, I was quite distressed.

On July 30th, from the top of a ridge, about three-quarters of a mile away, I could see a helicopter diving in and out of a tremendous cloud of dust where elephants were being trapped. Even over the sound of the helicopter and wind, I could hear elephants trumpeting extremely loudly. A little later, on July 30th, in the same area, I came upon a skittish elephant family that was doing an unusual amount of weeping from glands on the sides of their heads; they were clearly agitated.

One night during the trapping, one member of the capture team told me that they had darted a calf with a tranquilizer gun from the helicopter, but his mother refused to leave her infant and so they darted her too. They picked up the calf and left; when the mother woke up her infant was gone.

Over the past eighteen years, I have photographed many animals being trapped. Yet, I found this to be the most upsetting trapping situation I have witnessed.

James Balog is a photographer who specializes in the interface between humans and nature. His photos have appeared in National Geographic, Time, and Life, and he is the author of four books. Contact Mr. Balog at Jupiter Pictures, Boulder, Colorado, USA. Phone: 303-444- 5432. Fax: 303-444-4526.

