



ELEPHANT KING

1 × 53 min. Written and directed by Julian Thomas

HD, 5.1 and Stereo Executive producers: Sabine Holzer, Martin Mészáros



TERRA MATER
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A unique band of African elephants relies on a waterhole for survival during one of the driest winters on record. Forced into close proximity by thirst, we follow the friendships and fights, bonds and battles that form when drought hits the elephants of Namibia's Etosha National Park. And when the bull elephants' massive leader goes missing, the battle for his crown is about to begin.

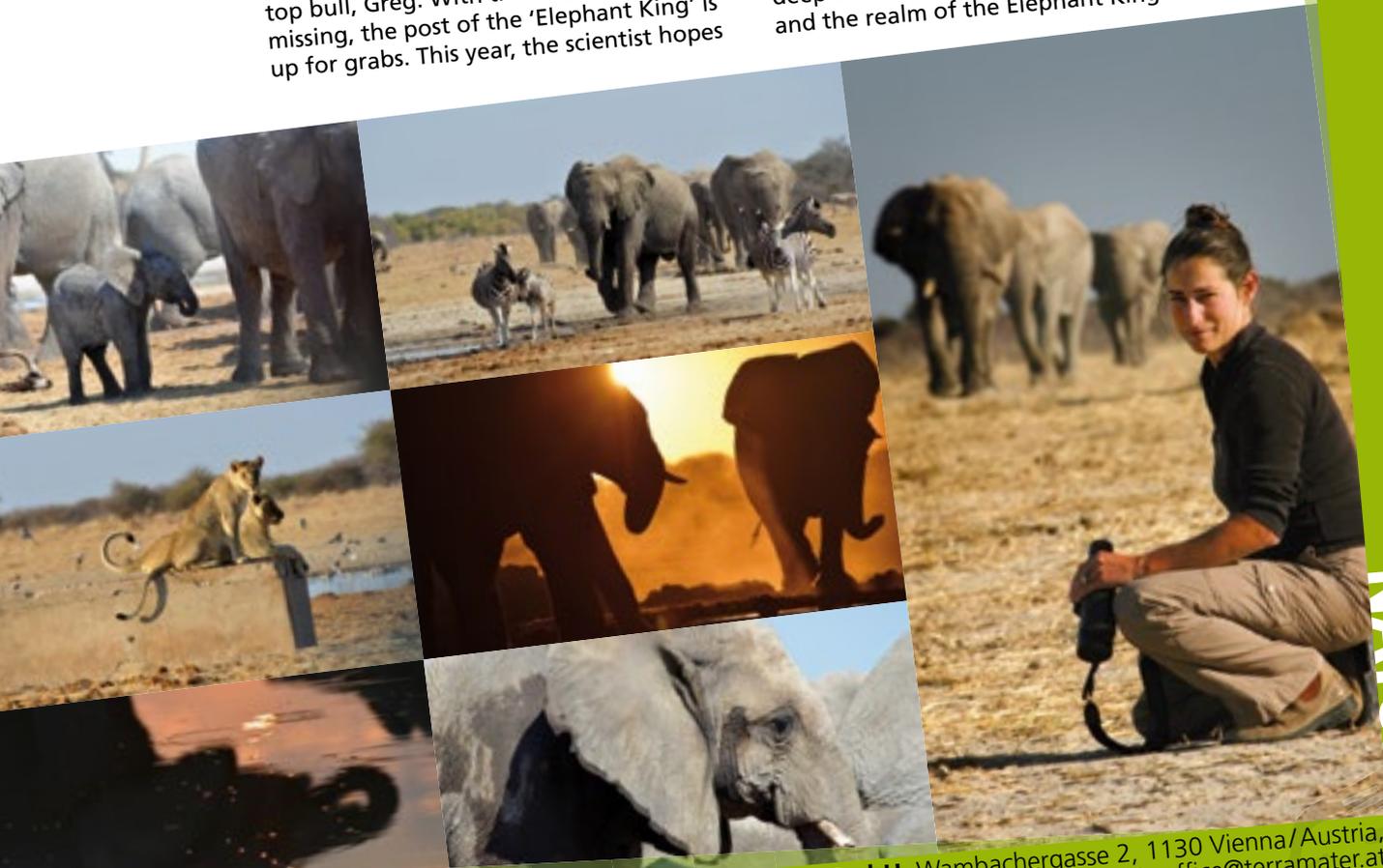
Monitoring the action is one of the world's leading experts in elephant conduct, scientist Caitlin O'Connell. She's spent the last 20 winters at this waterhole and studied the elephants' communication, their body language and vocalisations. Her unique ability to read elephants' minds has led to some remarkable findings. She was the first person to unearth the method of elephant communication through vibrations in the ground and to prove that elephants actually listen to these vibrations with special sensors in their feet and the tips of their trunks.

This season is going to be challenging. A year ago a devastating fire swept through Etosha, wiping out entire herds of elephants. Many prominent members of elephant society are missing. Among them, presumed dead, is Caitlin's favourite: the top bull, Greg. With the reigning monarch missing, the post of the 'Elephant King' is up for grabs. This year, the scientist hopes

to find out who will rise to the challenge and how the exciting fight for dominance will play out. As the drought wears on, what starts with subtle exchanges between rivals soon escalates into full scale fighting. Musth, the period when male elephants are at their most sexual, is a hormonal state that is normally suppressed by the presence of a dominant bull. Now, the top spot is vacant. We follow the key male characters throughout the season as they jostle for supremacy.

Yet where would the king be without his courtiers? In reality, elephant society is ruled by the family. But elephant family life is also being overturned this year. As the dry season persists, it's the youngest members who suffer most. Prevented from drinking and shunned by the matriarch, for some youngsters this dry season might be their last. Although elephants have a reputation as caring, model families, many families seem dysfunctional when times are hard. Only time will tell if all of this year's calves will survive the drought.

This film follows the stresses and strains of elephant society throughout the dry season. Day by day, we interpret the interactions of elephant society by deciphering their body language through the eyes of one of the world's leading experts as Caitlin O'Connell takes us on a journey deep into the world of elephant behaviour and the realm of the Elephant King.



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