

An Elephant in My Kitchen: What the Herd Taught Me about Love, Courage and Survival

Françoise Malby-Anthony with Katja Willemsen

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If you don't have time to run off to Africa, but would appreciate an authentic wildlife adventure filled with noble elephant matriarchs, orphaned baby rhinos, a hippo named Charlie, and extraordinary humans dedicated to rescuing and protecting these imperiled creatures, consider reading ***An Elephant in My Kitchen: What the Herd Taught Me about Love, Courage and Survival***. Written in first-person narrative, the book recounts how Françoise Malby-Anthony unexpectedly became sole director of the Thula Thula game reserve upon her husband's sudden death and her extraordinary efforts to keep the reserve open, build a wildlife rescue center for orphaned animals, and protect them from ruthless, relentless poachers. And yes, an actual baby elephant appears in her kitchen.

For those troubled by the illegal trade in wildlife, there is much to be learned from Malby-Anthony about the brutal realities of poaching. For one, even on a private game reserve, such as Thula Thula, poaching exists as an ever-present threat to both the animals and their protectors. The poachers operate with guns, drones, snares, sophisticated surveillance, radio listening devices, and heartless cruelty. Distinguishing between poachers "killing for the pot" and those "killing for profit," Malby-Anthony notes "the latter type is hell-bent on money and doesn't give a damn about animals or endangered species, and he won't hesitate to shoot the men and women who risk their lives to protect them." She recalls about a beloved rhino:

I still have nightmares about what they did to her. Once you've seen what poachers do to a rhino's face, you can't unsee it. They turned her beautiful face into a gruesome mess of blood and flesh, and she was alive when they did it. If she had died from a bullet, I might have learned to live with it. If the poachers had made sure she was dead before they hacked her face than I could have consoled myself that her death was in fact a godsend. But they didn't. They butchered her while she was a breathing, living, feeling rhino.

In response, Malby-Anthony relates many of the ways she has sought to protect the reserve's wildlife. She has tried an experimental horn infusion technique that injects toxins and an indelible dye in rhino's horn (to reduce demand and thereby deter poachers). When horn injections became controversial and failed to effectively deter poachers, she reluctantly accepted horn removal:

I made one of the toughest decisions of my life. What choice did I have? It's a war out there and I didn't know what else to do any more. A rhino's horn is Mother Nature in all its glory and when I look at our rhinos, I see prehistory, power and dignity. Poachers see dollars.

Even with horns removed, Thula Thula must engage a specialized, around-the-clock, paramilitary anti-poaching unit to protect the wildlife and caretakers on the reserve. Malby-Anthony's ever more vigilant efforts reflect ever-growing threats: "There are only 25,500 rhinos left in our world and they are being wiped out," and poachers will slaughter a rhino "for little more than a stub."

Despite the attention to poaching, ***An Elephant in My Kitchen*** is primarily about love, courage, and hope. The book reveals the deep bonds that can form between humans and other animals, honours the dedication of those caring for and protecting orphaned animals, and pays tribute to the courage and dignity of the animals who come to trust their human caretakers. Ultimately, ***An Elephant in My Kitchen*** is a story of hope, the grand hope that people can live peacefully with—rather than eradicate—the elephants, rhinos, hippos and other majestic creatures of the bush.

Of course, if you have time to run off to Africa, you can read the book while visiting Thula Thula.

<http://thulathula.com/accomodation/elephant-safari-lodge-south-africa-zululand/>

You may see me there.