



**AMBOSELI TRUST  
FOR ELEPHANTS**

6 June 2007

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in regard to the news that Rani has rejected her calf, Jude. In the Amboseli population where I have worked for many years, a mother elephant's experience plays an important role in the survival rate of her calves. Our 35 years of data show that the natural mortality rate of live born calves in the first year of life is 17% for first time mothers compared to only 7% for experienced mothers. There is no evidence to indicate that wild elephant mothers, experienced or inexperienced, abandon or kill their own babies. The mortality rate of captive born babies, however, is extremely high and a good number of the deaths are caused by lack of mothering skills.

At the St. Louis Zoo, Rani's aggression toward, and rejection of, her infant, Jude, highlights the fact that lack of experience with calves throughout a lifespan (which is typical of zoos) tends to produce highly inadequate mothering skills at the birth event. Given the time and opportunity to learn, mothers will form attachments and learn to mother appropriately. But these opportunities are extremely rare in zoos.

Rani's baby, Jude, is fortunate to have Ellie as a grandmother. In the wild, calves of very young mothers often spend more time near to their grandmothers than they do to their own mothers, presumably because they are aware of the superior care received. Calves in the wild are also observed to suckle from their grandmothers. As long as Ellie continues to be willing to suckle Jade, she should be permitted to remain with her full time. Ellie receives plenty of food and is certainly capable of suckling two calves. Encouraging this behavior not only supplies Jade with the physical and emotional nourishment she needs, but it provides Ellie's 10 month old daughter, Maliha, with a good start in acquiring mothering skills.

Sincerely,

Joyce Poole, PhD  
Research Director

Amboseli Trust for Elephants  
PO Box 15135, Langata 00509  
Nairobi, Kenya  
Tel/fax +254 (0)20 891191  
jpoole@elephantvoices.org  
www.elephanttrust.org

