

African Elephant Sociality in an Arid Environment — New Insights on Leadership and Low Frequency Vocal Coordination

April 19th (Tuesday): 4-5pm ET

Dr. Caitlin O'Connell



African elephants live within matriarchal societies, where females live together for life and coming-of-age males leave their natal families to join all-male groups. In the scrub desert of Etosha National Park, Namibia, elephant social behavior and habitat use are influenced by social context, resource abundance, and environmental fluctuations. Data will be presented on factors influencing the fission-fusion nature of family group dynamics, character stability and social influence within the population, long distance communication and the roles and turn-taking that occur within vocal bouts. Ongoing studies on the elephant's ability to detect low frequency vocalizations at a distance will also be discussed.

[Dr. Caitlin O'Connell](#) is an award-winning author and photographer who has been studying elephants in the wild for the last thirty years, having written dozens of scientific papers, numerous feature magazine articles, and two memoirs about her experiences. After completing her Ph.D. in ecology at the University of California, Davis, she worked as an adjunct professor at Stanford University, and is currently an Instructor in the Department of Otolaryngology, Head & Neck Surgery at Harvard Medical School studying elephant low-frequency hearing, and is a faculty associate at HUCE, while also overseeing a non-profit foundation ([Utopia Scientific](#)) promoting the importance of science and conservation. Dr. O'Connell co-developed the award-winning Smithsonian documentary, *Elephant King* about her research. She has also authored eight popular books about elephants, including [Wild Rituals](#), a look at how other animal traditions, cultures, and communities from around the world are similar to our own.

Hosted by the [Soft Math Lab](#).

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