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Tuskless Elephants

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Dr. Lynch-Binieck

Comp 200

17 February 2019

Tuskless Elephants

Ever since I was a little girl I've loved animals to my very core. My parents (and other adults) always told me I should be a veterinarian. Helping animals is great, and I applaud those that do, but I couldn't see myself helping the sick or injured ones because I don't want to see them hurt. Junior year of high school I enrolled in an environmental science class -- it was eye-opening and a lot of fun. The teacher and I had deep conversations about the environment and the animals within our world. During that year, my peers and I were pressured to figure out what we wanted to do when we graduated high school. Questions like, "What college do you want to go to? What do you want your major to be?" plagued my mind. I felt young and confused. I recalled what everyone used to say about me becoming a vet and then my mind wandered to environmental science. When the end of senior year came, I got a scholarship to my local community college. Earlier that year I had put environmental science as my major on all of my applications because of the pressure I felt to "choose". Getting the scholarship to my backup school, which is what the community college was, pushed me further into the idea that I needed to go with a major in mind. Environmental science felt like a good balance between practical and interest. This turned out to be a hasty decision.

Now, as an English major, I had the chance to reflect on how I was once blinded by my love for the environment when I picked my initial major. Since my switch, I have put my environmental interest on the back burner of my mind-oven; that is until recently.

I would like to say that it was a beautiful day when a brilliant article (which I will explain in more detail later) landed on my lap full of possibilities and empowerment-- because that would certainly spice up the story-- but truthfully, I don't even remember the specifics of this particular day. I was taking a semester at community college and one of my classes was public speaking. For a warm up exercise, we had to pick a recent news article and explain it briefly to the class for our next session. As someone who has alerts from CNN and National Geographic on my phone, I didn't think this would be a very challenging task.

Later that day, after receiving the assignment, I was half-sitting, half-laying, and half-petting my dog (yes that is too many halves) when my phone vibrated beside me. I remember the TV was on, most likely playing *Impractical Jokers*, and I wasn't doing anything productive. Thus, I picked up my phone and saw that the alert was a news article: "Under poaching pressure, elephants are evolving to lose their tusks", from the National Geographic. As the pot of environmental love, on the back burner of my mind, began to boil, I became immersed in the topic at hand. Despite my past environmental science class having had touched on poaching and animal endangerment, quite honestly, I don't really know the real reason I latched on to this subject so quickly.

I read deeply in to the article, astonished at the findings described in it. As it stated, an increased rate of elephants being born without tusks in various African national parks was being reported. Without their tusks, elephants were less desirable to poachers, meaning they were less

likely to be killed (Maron). After reading, I remember thinking, “This is my article”. Next public speaking class I was eager to be the *second*, never the first, person to stand up and share their article with everyone. While I was summarizing my article I could feel the intrigue bubbling in my stomach. The longer I thought about it, the more I grew frustrated that humans could impact an entire animal species *so* drastically -- this brewed something close to hatred. For all we know elephants could have evolved to not have tusks in time, but the fact that our savagery and greed caused this evolutionary trait to begin to develop made me furious.

Even so, I figured I would eventually forget about the article and move on with my life. I tried to not think of it often; although, it probably didn't help that I kept the link in my notes (which is besides the point). For some reason, this article and this phenomena stuck in my head like a piece of gum on the bottom of a shoe.

Like fate itself, my opportunity rose in the form of this class [Research and Composition 200 at Kutztown University]. While, at first, I struggled with picking a research topic, inspiration struck me in the form of that article, tickling at the edges of my consciousness. Despite every other topic I checked out, I found my mind wandering back to the elephants. *What could possibly be the environmental effects of elephants losing their tusks? Does it affect other species? What is the poaching crisis of elephants like today?* These were the thoughts spiraling in my head. The boiling pot had now begun to pour over.

If it isn't already apparent, this directly relates to how I will further my work in this class [Research and Composition 200 at Kutztown University] in the next two projects [of the class]. I want to better understand the poaching crisis that is going on in Africa and its effects on the elephants themselves within the surrounding environment. Narrowing my focus, I would like to

explore this concern in conjunction with the atrocities that elephant poaching is bringing to Africa and its animal inhabitants. In hopes of both furthering my education and passion for wanting to help animals, I had questioned how this assignment would make an impact on my future academic career. I believe my future assignments [of the class previously mentioned] will not only open my eyes to global issues, but more so help me further my writing capacities.

Works Cited

Maron, Dina. "Under Poaching Pressure, Elephants Are Evolving to Lose Their Tusks." *National Geographic*, National Geographic, 9 Nov. 2018, www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2018/11/wildlife-watch-news-tuskless-elephants-behavior-change/.