

DETERMINING THE CAUSE OF DEATH



MONITORING THE
ILLEGAL KILLING
OF ELEPHANTS



CATEGORY (TYPE) OF DEATH: ILLEGALLY KILLED (POACHED)

Illegal type of death is defined as death due to voluntary human action(s), with the intent to kill the animal.

Signs to pay attention to when a carcass is discovered:

- What interferences (signs of human involvement) can you identify?
 - Pay attention to the body of the animal and the surrounding area where the carcass is located
- Status of Tusks: Presence vs. Absence?
 - Absent: Chopped out, sawn off, pulled out or naturally absent
 - Present: Intact, broken or splintered
- Other parts taken: tail, ears, organs, feet, skin, trunk, etc.
- Have any efforts been made to hide the carcass?
 - Covered with branches, burned or skinned?
- Position of carcass: How did the elephant fall?
 - Laying on its side, brisket, etc.

INJURY AND WOUNDS

Apart from snares, leg wounds can be inflicted by spears, gunshots and traps.
Other entry wounds on stomach region and rib cage; spear heads and bullet penetration.
Broken ribs could indicate signs of spearing or badly placed shots from a fire-arm.

SURROUNDING EVIDENCE

Spent bullet cartridges close to carcass or in the immediate area.
Bullet tips often found in carcass remains or in rot patch.
Spear or arrow heads broken off in carcass or found in the immediate area.
Poacher tracks and other signs, any disturbances on ground surface or surrounding vegetation.
Dead elephant near an active camp with a burning fire, recent smoke or hot coals (smoke from fires can often be seen and smelled from a distance).
Elephant meat drying on racks near carcass location.
Surrounding branches cut from trees in order to roll tusks on chop it out.
Branches also used to hide the carcass.



Fruit injected with poison.



Investigating the surrounding area of a crime scene will give the observant law enforcement officer critical clues about how the animal died.

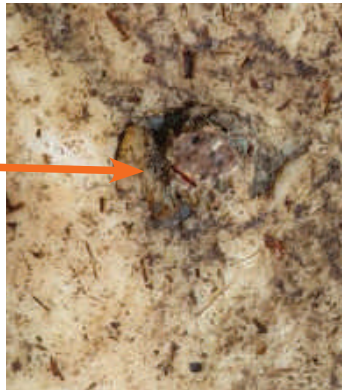


CARCASS REMAINS

Inspect carcass for bullet wounds, other wounds, haematoma (bleeding beneath the skin), marks on skin or bones, broken or splintered bones, etc.

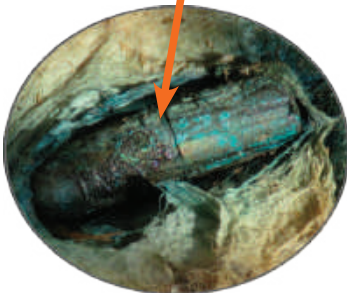


Bullet hole through scapula.



Inspect the remains of the carcass and look for anything that is not normal. If only bones are left look for any unnatural marks. Pay special attention to the scapula, femurs, skull and ribs.

Bullet suspended under skin.



Bullet damage to bones.



CONCEALMENT

Hiding carcasses from aerial detection and scavengers and/or accelerating process of decomposition will leave signs such as:

- Burnt/burning carcass in a remote location to avoid detection from ground and aerial patrol
- Cut fresh branches used for covering a carcass
- Dead animal skinned and then the skin is either taken, buried or thrown into the nearby river. Skinning accelerates scavenger action and carcass decomposition.



Different techniques are used to try to hide carcasses. Left, skinning elephant and right stacking branches to hide carcass from aerial patrols.



CASE STUDIES

CAUSE OF DEATH (FACTOR)

OBSERVATION / REMARKS

GUNSHOT

Fresh carcass: Look for entry & exit wounds to the skull, chest, abdominal region.

Status of Tusks: Missing tusks, chopped or sawn off. Usually large damage to cranium (skull).

Surrounding evidence: Human interferences, tracks, cartridge cases, cut branches.

CASE STUDY 1



FRESH CARCASS

REMARKS - CASE STUDY 1:

1. External wounds on spine, inflicted by panga, backbone severed, animal paralysed prior to death.
2. Bleeding, damage beneath skin, ruptured arteries.
3. Bullet exit wound, bullet stuck under the skin.
4. Tusks absent, chopped out with axe, large scale damage to skull.
5. Disturbed vegetation, clear sign of struggle just prior to death.
6. Fresh tracks present (3 sets of tracks).
7. Cartridge cases (.375, solid).
8. Ambush site of shooter.

Evidence = Tracks & Cartridge cases

CASE STUDY 2



RECENT CARCASS

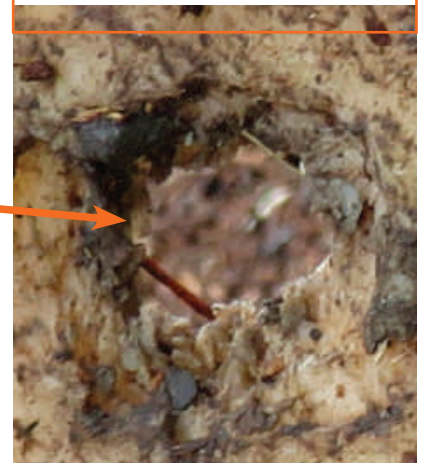
REMARKS - CASE STUDY 2:

1. Bullet wound visible on remaining skin.
2. Bullet found using metal detector on rot patch.
3. Tusks absent, large scale damage to cranium (skull), tusks chopped out.

OTHER SIGNS (CLUES) THAT COULD BE FOUND AT OLDER CARCASSES



Large calibre bullet hole through scapula (shoulder blade).



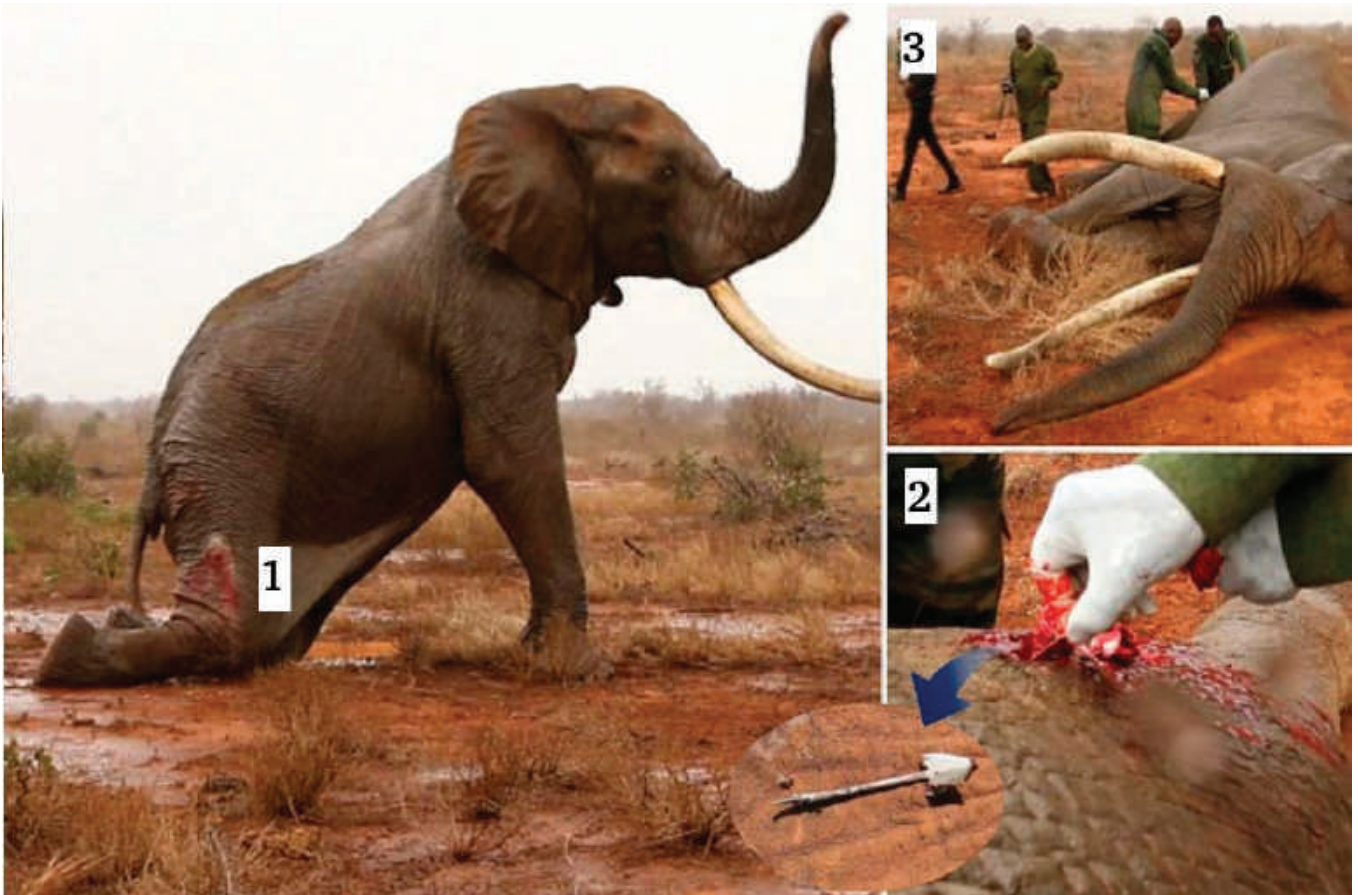
CAUSE OF DEATH (FACTOR)

OBSERVATION / REMARKS

POISON ARROWS

- Fresh carcass: Elephants that die in pain usually have erect genitalia.
- Animals do not, usually, die immediately; there are signs of struggle and disturbed vegetation from wriggling feet.
- Usually run for a short time before collapsing.
- Depending on the type of poison, vomiting might be evident.
- Arrow heads often recovered.

CASE STUDY 3



REMARKS - CASE STUDY 3:

1. Elephant has a broken femur.
2. Arrow head retrieved, inside the wound.
3. Poison spread through body, elephant dies, heart arrhythmia (tests usually required to confirm poisoning).

CAUSE OF DEATH (FACTOR)

OBSERVATION / REMARKS

SPEAR

- Evidence of spear wounds on carcass can be seen, commonly found around the rib cage and stomach region.
- Look at chest, stomach, leg and head.
- Spear heads often recovered.
- Remains: Could have signs of broke bones, lacerations on skin.
- Marks on bones not belonging to scavengers.
- If crime scene is fresh: Surrounding area heavily disturbed.



Spears still visible.
Both these cases are related to Human-Elephant Conflict (HEC). Carcasses were found close to community land. Large pierce wounds on body of animal.





Large scale damage to chest region, stabbing wounds from spears.



Broken femur, not rounded, cracked and broken, signs of spearing.



Spear wounds present all over body of calf and spear still lodged in head.

CAUSE OF DEATH (FACTOR)

OBSERVATION / REMARKS

SNARES/TRAPS

Look for visible snares around neck, trunk or feet.

Snare on neck or body of animal (usually calves and juveniles).

Swollen leg or strangled trunk with wire still on body.

On bones, scars of cut marks from wire or cable snares will often be present.



Snares are not immediately deadly to elephants, but if left, cutting into bone and flesh, septicaemia will most often set in and elephant dies from blood associated poisoning.

Still considered illegal killing

OTHER TRAPS:



Different types of traps are used (left) gin trap, (right) pitfall trap. These traps will inflict serious wounds. By inspecting the remains, the cause of death will be revealed, depending on how fresh the carcass is. Falling logs have also been used, very primitive method for killing large herbivores.

Remember: Even if the targeted species for which the trap was set was not elephant, the killing of the elephant is still illegal.



CAUSE OF DEATH (FACTOR)	OBSERVATION / REMARKS
POISON BAIT	Often animal vomits and coughs before death (fluids in lungs).
	Happens in settlement areas (usually), using bait and poisoned food traps.
	Dead birds (e.g. vultures) or other scavengers in the vicinity of the carcass.
	Presence of containers of chemicals and of non-natural food types such as water melons and fruits (e.g. oranges) in the vicinity of carcass(es).
	At fresh carcasses poison can often be smelled.
	Carcasses around water holes, usually then source of water is poisoned.



Signs of vomiting prior to death.

At fresh carcasses investigate the surrounding area you might find the food item used to administer the poison (lucern, oranges, melons).



Usually no other evidence will be found on the body, there might be vomiting and **secondary** poisoning of vultures and/or scavengers.

Take special care with carcasses that were poisoned! These carcasses must be destroyed after investigations. If water sources were poisoned, either it must be drained or neutralized to avoid secondary poisoning whereas carcasses must be burned or buried.



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