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SMS ELEPHANTS

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Roland Piquepaille's Technology Trends

How new technologies are modifying our way of life

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mercredi 16 mars 2005

Elephants Send SMS to Tell Where They Are

Two months ago, I told you that the Wildlife Conservation Society was planning to **count elephants from space**. So I was very intrigued by a very short article from the *Inquirer*, "**Elephants text their location**." This teasing story said that when elephants start to approach their fields, the farmers are alerted by SMS in time to politely ask the elephants to move over and save their crops. The whole story is told on the **Save the Elephants** (STE) site. In fact, these conservationists are putting GSM/GPS collars around elephants in some areas of Kenya. And the collared elephants are sending SMS messages directly to farmers' phones. You can even track individual elephants on the Web -- if you're an authorized user. But read more...

Here is the first paragraph of the *Inquirer* article.

> A reliable source informs the INQ that conservationists in Kenya have been fitting elephants with mini mobile phones. The phone gives away the elephant's location via a text (SMS) message.

Because the Inquirer was short on facts, let's start with some pictures coming from the Save the Elephants website.

It is hard to see on this picture, but the GSM/GPS collars are designed to have all electronics above the head and counter-weight below (Credit: Save the Elephants).

On this one, which shows unfolded GSM/GPS collars inspected by David Gachuche, STE's software engineer, it's easier to see that the electronic parts are on the top (Credit: Save the Elephants).

Here is a link to a **project progress report** (June 2004, PDF format, 12 pages, 899 KB) from which the above pictures have been extracted.

One of the goals of this project which started in February 2004 was to "develop state-of-the-art miniaturised radio-collars using GSM mobile phone technology, for monitoring endangered wildlife."

Here are some more details about the project.

> The new GPS-GSM tags are lighter, cheaper and last longer, and enable the advantages of GPS tracking to be spread to other species which have previously been excluded due to the bulk and weight of current GPS collars. David Gachuche (STE's software

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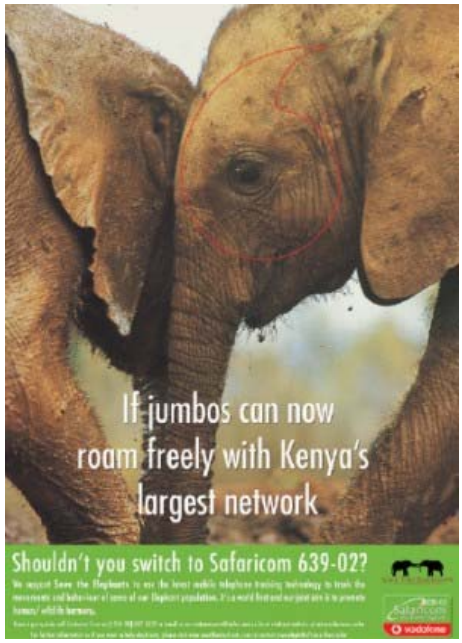
> engineer) has designed the Animal Tracking System which will allow users to access the system over the internet, using a standard web browser and view the most current locations of collared animals in (near) real-time [and other ways.]
>
> All these different access points are all fed by the same spatial database that is automatically updated when the GPS-GSM tag sends a message, via Short Message Service (SMS), indicating the latest GPS position of the animal.

And here is one of the first conclusions of this experiment.

> Our elephant tracking has already shown that there are certain crucial corridors that need to be left open so that elephants can reach their feeding grounds.



This project has been supported by **Safaricom**, the current leading mobile telephone operator in Kenya and partially owned by Vodafone. On the left is one Safaricom advertisement which recently appeared on Kenya Airways Magazine, Msafiri (Credit: Safaricom). Here is a link to **a better quality version** (PDF format, 1 pages, 247 KB)

For more information, please visit the STE website.

Sources: Tony Dennis, The Inquirer, March 15, 2005; and Save the Elephants website

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