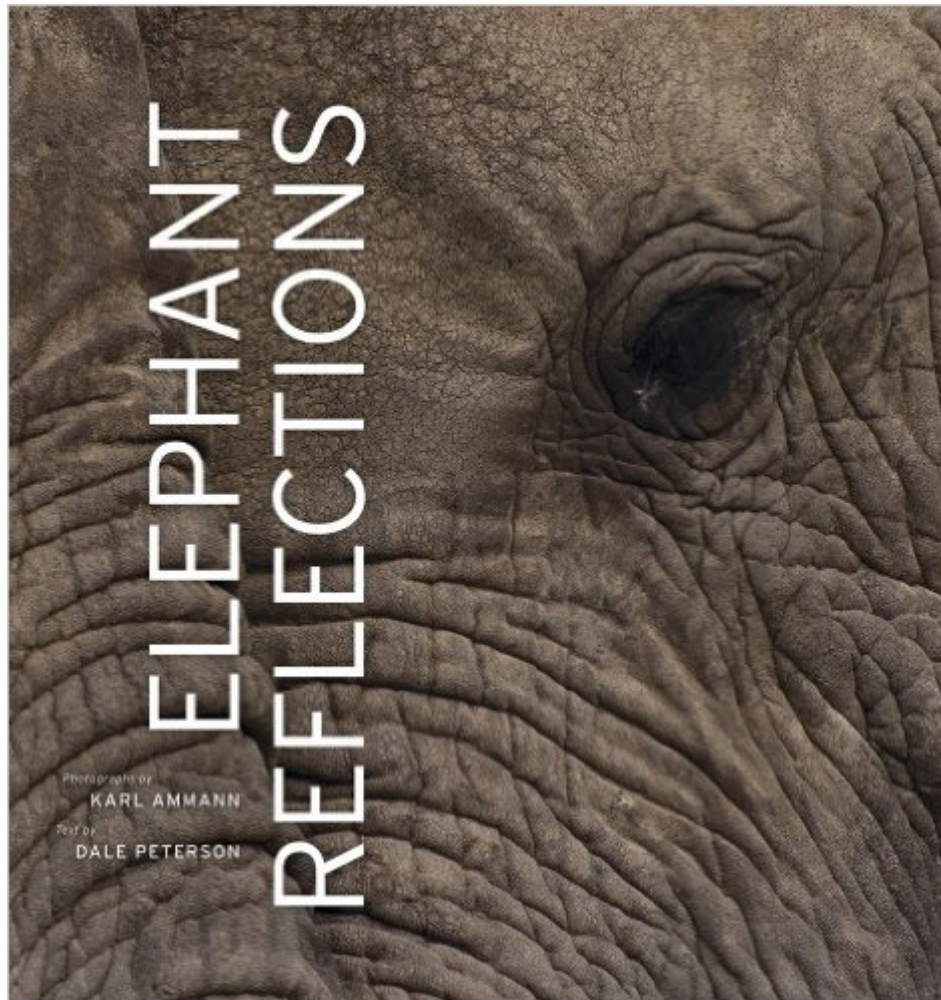


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# Elephant Reflections



## Synopsis

Elephant Reflections brings award-winning wildlife photographer Karl Ammann's gorgeous images together with a revelatory text by writer Dale Peterson to illuminate one of nature's greatest and most original works of art: the elephant. The photographs move from the purely aesthetic to the informative, depicting animals who are at once enigmatic, individual, mysterious, elusive, and iconic. In riveting prose, Peterson introduces the work of field scientists in Africa and explains their recent astonishing discoveries. He then explores the natural history and conservation status of African elephants and discusses the politics of ivory. Elephant Reflections is a book that could change the way the world thinks about elephants while we still have some measure of control over their fate.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: University of California Press (May 4, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0520253779

ISBN-13: 978-0520253773

Product Dimensions: 10 x 1 x 10.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (29 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Stunning photography and concise, beguiling text communicate the "otherness" of African elephants to our awe and understanding in this gorgeous and absorbing oversize volume. While the bulk of the book is photography and the pictures lead into the text at the back, readers really should read Peterson's words first, then go back and view the photographs in a new and richer light. Although it's now widely known that elephants live in matriarchal family groups, that bulls are solitary, that they show affection and grief and communicate with each other over long distances, it was only 40 years ago that we didn't even know what elephants ate or how much. Peterson covers elephant study from its beginnings in the 60s when Iain Douglas-Hamilton pioneered the field study of individuals, family groups and socialization, similar to the work Jane Goodall was doing with apes. Since then field

researchers have viewed: bulls in musth (some very funny - and dangerous - stories about this condition, initially diagnosed as "an alarming malady"), the reunions of social groups, childcare networks, fear, sickness, and all the drama of family life, including the tragedy of poaching and slaughter. Peterson describes the working of the elephants' bodies - their sensitive feet, their replaceable teeth, their formidable hide, their remarkable trunk. Reading Peterson's appreciation of the trunk, you will want one yourself. Its sense of smell is ten times more powerful than a bloodhound and it can pick up a coin off the ground. It's an arm, a snorkel, a suction tool for drinking or showering, a communication device, a digger, a scratcher, even a cane.

Elephants are the first exotic animal of which kids have some knowledge. Every Noah's Ark set has a pair, and children are able to draw elephants almost as soon as they can draw any recognizable animal. We love Babar and we love Horton. But most westerners see real elephants only in zoos and circuses, where they are among the favorite attractions. In zoos, they don't do a whole lot besides stand around, but they are still a big draw. Why this should be so is not answered by the book *Elephant Reflections* (University of California Press) with photographs by Karl Ammann and text by Dale Peterson. In fact, although there is much understanding promoted by Peterson's text, even he can't account for what he calls "the almost inexplicable sense of elephant otherness." This lovely, large-size book of 150 photographs of different aspects of the African elephant has enough dramatic, anatomical, or endearing pictures to increase anyone's appreciation for the mysteries of this largest of land animals. The book is not a biology text, but more a coffee-table art book, and is entirely successful in this realm. The photos are not categorized by species or age, but by themes, like "Textures" or "Behaviors" or "Colors". Colors? Elephants are gray. But here they are not limited to gray. Ammann has taken advantage of different shades of sunlight to show an orange-shaded elephant, for instance, but usually the colors come from the exteriors of the elephants themselves, dusted or dribbled with gold or tan. The gorgeous section of textures show that this is a category to which a whole larger book might be devoted. Certainly here are the smooth hard tusks, or the strange toenails that look like half a goose egg. But the elephant has the most varied skin texture of any animal.

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