



# Wild Orphans

*Gerry Ellis*

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## **Wild Orphans** Gerry Ellis

Wild Orphans tells the emotional tale of eight baby elephants living in the nursery of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Orphanage at the Nairobi National Park in Kenya, East Africa. It chronicles their story over two long years, including memorable images of the rescue of abandoned baby elephants, their upbringing by dedicated 24-hour surrogate human "mothers," the lessons they learn, and ultimately, their release back into the wild. The stars of Wild Orphans are the "Orphan 8": eight babies who arrived at the orphanage during the summer of 1999, a time of prolonged drought and increased ivory poaching. They are: Natumi - Rescued from a well at just two months old after her mother was killed by hunters, she is the ringleader of the eight and is very possessive of the smaller babies; Icholta - Rescued at six weeks old after being abandoned by her herd. She is small for her age, with soft fuzz on her head, and is very gentle and friendly; Ilingwezi - Rescued at just one month, she was abandoned by her herd after falling into a deep gully. She is very sweet and playful; Idie - Four months old when rescued from a well, Idie grieved deeply for the family that abandoned her. Idie and Ilingwezi are now best friends; Nyiro - Found in a trench, he is sturdy and tough. As the smallest and most out-going of the group, he is a great favorite among the bigger elephants; Salama - Just three or four months old when abandoned by a herd that was fleeing poachers, Salama is tough, confident, and occasionally pushy; Lolokwe - He was rescued after falling into a well at just one month old. It is possible that he, Salama, and Nyiro all share the same father; Laikipia - She was rescued at four months after falling down a well. While Wild Orphans focuses on the adventures of these elephants, the reader will also be introduced to other orphans living in the nursery, their caregivers, older "graduate" elephants who return to teach the babies, and the greater story of the African elephant's plight. Never before has a photographer been granted this kind of access or spent this length of time photographing these orphans of Nairobi. Never before has their return to the wild been documented. Wild Orphans is certainly a landmark in nature photography and journalism, but it is also, perhaps more importantly, a story: One that will warm the soul and pull at the heart-strings of all animal-lovers.

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