

Elephants on the Move

Evaluation summary

ELEPHANTS ON THE MOVE

Project partners



The Institute for
Research in Schools



About the project

Elephants on the Move has been developed in partnership with the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and Game Rangers International. Students investigate the movement and behaviour of orphaned elephants in Zambia’s Kafue National Park using real GPS tracking data to learn about the science of animal movement and how conservation efforts use this information to make informed strategies to protect endangered species.

This hands-on project introduces modern conservation techniques and gives students a chance to contribute to genuine research. It also builds awareness of habitat loss, poaching, and human-elephant conflict, linking science learning to urgent global challenges.

Student registrations

Students from four schools and colleges in the north of England took part in the Elephants on the Move pilot in 2023-24. The project attracted a higher proportion of female and younger students than average for IRIS research projects.

	24-25
Number	69
Post-16	41%
Female	62%

Aims

- Increase awareness of conservation challenges, including habitat loss, poaching and human animal conflict
- Learn how modern conservation techniques, including GPS tracking, are helping increase survival rates in orphaned African elephants
- Use data and satellite imagery to map elephant activity, behaviour, home ranges and seasonal variations in their movement.

IRIS also evaluated the structure of the project, the appropriacy of the supporting resources and how the schools approached the project to explore ways to improve delivery.

Methodology

Data on the running and impact of the project was gathered from surveys and interviews.

Item	No of responses
IRIS pre-participation survey	40 students; five teachers
IRIS post-participation survey	29 students; five teachers
Additional questions	24 students
Teacher interviews	Two teachers
Student interviews	20 students from two schools

Impact on students

Teachers told us that this project supported students to:

- Have a greater understanding of the real-world applications of STEM
- Have a greater interest in STEM beyond the curriculum
- Become more confident of their STEM abilities
- Develop important transferable skills including communication, teamwork and problem-solving

Impact on students’ skills development:

100% of students agreed that they developed important skills that will help them in the future.

Elephants on the Move

Through the project, students developed their own research skills...

92% Analysing complex information

92% Presenting their findings

89% Evaluating sources of information

89% Using advanced technology or software

...and their transferable skills.

92% Speaking

89% Listening

89% Planning

89% Leadership

“I had a chance to work on topics that I have never done before and I gained research skills which will be useful in university.”

Year 12, female student

“It was very rewarding; [it] makes you feel more independent and connects you to other students.”

Year 12, female student

Evaluation Summary

“It was a great opportunity to do research on an animal conservation project and I gained analysis skills and team working skills from processing raw data and communicating with group mates.

Student

They [students] absolutely loved using Google Earth Pro. There's something about it, the visual nature of it... It's like a 3D landscape of the entire planet available to you to look at and Movebank as well. I think that's a really useful skill, learning how we can take data from one place and import it into a different bit of software.”

Teacher

Impact on students' knowledge of conservation and research

The project deepened students' interest in, and knowledge of, conservation. Students...

82% ...feel more knowledgeable about wildlife conservation

57% ...had a stronger interest in being involved in local conservation

The project helped students to feel more positive about STEM and conservation. Students...

82% ...now know how STEM can make a difference in the real world

57% ...feel hopeful about the future for wildlife conservation

Elephants on the Move

The project helped students to feel more positive about scientific research. Students...

82% ...can make a valuable contribution to research

57% ...understand success in STEM is a team effort

"IRIS has provided me with opportunities to look and research and see what people do for the world. So, science is a way that people find things out that can be applied and so without that, where would we be? It does make you think that you can contribute and make everything a bit better."

Year 12, male student

"It will be an unforgettable experience as I learnt how to do an independent research work with my teammates about a topic beyond the school curriculum, which [the] experience is kind of what uni students do."

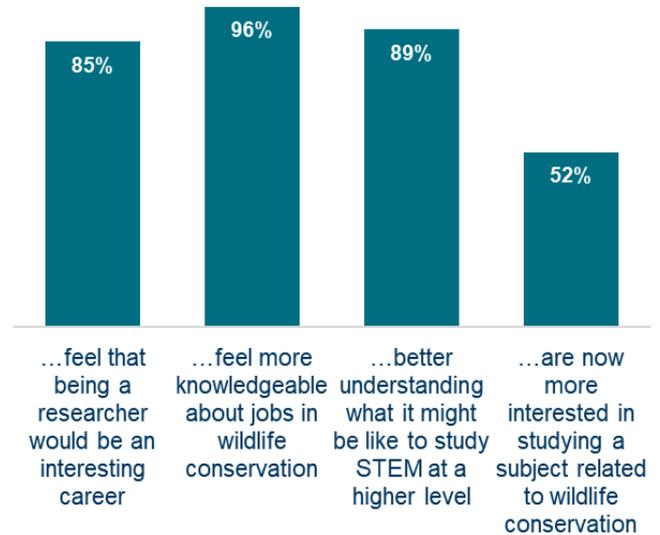
Year 12, female student

100% of students rated their experience as 'good' or 'very good'.

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Future career impact:

The project helped students to explore new areas of science and opened their eyes to possible future careers. Students agree they...



"Before starting my IRIS project, I did not know what I wanted to do after college. But now I do, by going to university and studying ecology and then zoology."

Year 12, male student

"It was a bit challenging but broadening and sharpening my skills helps on my future prospects."

Year 12, female student

"[In one group] it actually motivated the students to choose triple science. It's given them a better understanding of science."

Teacher

Impact on teachers

Teachers expressed considerable satisfaction and enjoyment from delivering the project. The project was recognised as inclusive and had engaged the interest of students who had previously shown limited interest in STEM.

The project had broadened students' understanding of the scope of STEM and demonstrated how their skills could be applied across diverse contexts and career pathways.

Teachers found that running the project helped them to...

- 100% ...communicate the excitement of STEM

- 100% ...enrich their working relationships with their students

- 100% ...make curriculum links to real world applications

- 100% ...increase their enjoyment of teaching

"It's made me feel more positive about teaching. I'll be promoting environmental skills and careers by running Earth Observation and Elephants on the Move in line with my values to conserve biodiversity."

Teacher

"The level of resources are amazing. The access to real data is great."

Teacher

"It's really interesting, it's engaging... It's always nice to have something completely new that you've not worked on before and that stretches you a little bit outside your comfort zone as well. It's been exciting working on it."

Teacher

"I did feel it's been my favourite project, actually. I've really enjoyed it."

Teacher

From September 2025 the project will be launched across the UK, opening the opportunity to hundreds of UK secondary students.

