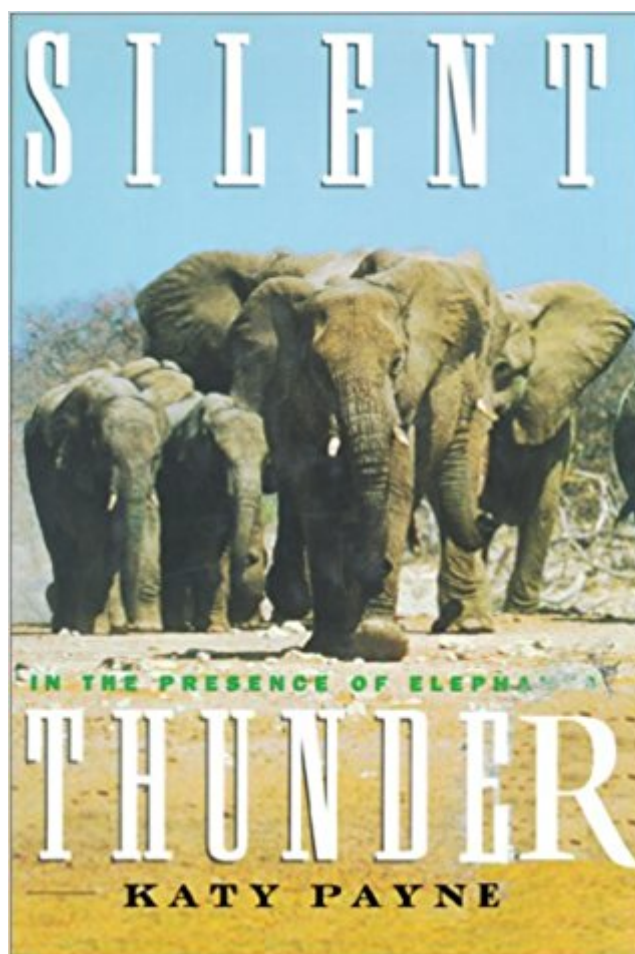


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SILENT THUNDER: In The Presence Of Elephants



Synopsis

Scientific discovery is not always the result of a careful accumulation of data or a measured consideration of the facts. Sometimes it takes a leap of imagination. Katy Payne, a naturalist and conservationist, took just such a leap and made an amazing discovery about how elephants communicate. And that was only the beginning of her adventure. In 1984, Katy Payne visited the elephants at Washington Park Zoo in Portland, Oregon. She had been studying whale songs for the last fifteen years, and she was curious about the ways that elephants -- the largest living land mammals -- communicated with each other. What Payne observed in her first week seemed, at the time, to be little cause for scientific excitement. But on her flight home, she flushed back to a childhood experience of singing in the church choir. Suddenly she realized that she had felt, in the presence of the elephants, a deep throbbing in the air just like the lowest notes of the church organ. Payne and two colleagues were soon able to show that elephants are powerful infrasound -- sound pitched too low for the human ear to hear -- in communication. This "silent thunder" allows elephants to interact over long distances. This brilliant, unorthodox, nonlinearless was the basis of her discovery of infrasonic communication among elephant and is typical of Payne's work as a naturalist. It also infuses this deeply felt and observed book with an extraordinary spirit, Payne and her colleagues went on to do important field research on elephant communication in Kenya, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. But in 1991 the peaceful rhythms of their work were violently interrupted by a cull -- a planned killing -- that destroyed five of the elephant families they were studying. This destruction convinced her that all life is sacred. Payne determined to challenge the philosophies that support culling. Silent Thunder is a natural history rich in ponderings about the animal world and how humans participate in it. It is also a passionate story of Payne's own spiritual quest as she turns an observant eye on her own role in this world and honors the holistic perspective of her indigenous friends, who became her teachers in Zimbabwe, Payne's courage and empathy shine through on every page, giving this unique combination of scientific journal and personal memoir an unforgettable emotional power.

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Customer Reviews

Naturalist and bioacoustics researcher Katy Payne stood near an elephant cage at a zoo and felt a strange "throb and flutter" in the air. When she later realized that the feeling was very like that caused by the lowest notes of a pipe organ, she embarked on a journey of scientific and personal discovery that took her to Africa to study how the huge mammals communicate. For years, she lived close to the elephants she loved, getting to know individuals and describing their long-distance infrasound "conversations." After her fifth such expedition, one third of the elephant population she was studying was killed in a planned cull by the Zimbabwean government. Whether or not you accept Payne's hypothesis that elephants are extraordinarily intelligent and capable of communicating with each other and with other species (including humans), you will find her descriptions of the animals compelling and compassionate. Her grief at the loss of her elephant friends is palpable, and she uses it to utmost effect in decrying not only the ivory trade, but the way in which humans have decided to live on the planet. --Therese Littleton

"I was hearing faint sounds that might have been overtones of stronger sounds that the elephants, but not I, could hear." In a chronicle that effectively blends memoir with the drama of scientific discovery, Payne (*Elephants Calling*), an acoustic biologist at Cornell, describes her role in the discovery of infrasonic communication between elephants. As she does so, she recounts her 13 years' study of African elephants?observing their social and family structures and behaviors, including the digging of wells. A scientist's respect for the elephants, "my gray friends," and for the native scouts informs her work. Payne writes, "You appreciate the value of silence when you watch elephants at night.... Every animal in the herd listens when the herd is listening. To use silence so well: if I could choose for people one attribute of elephants, I'd choose this." Payne can be passionate, especially regarding the issues of poaching and the harvesting of ivory, and she is convinced that any decision about ivory harvesting must take into account both the experience of

elephants themselves as well as the historic relations between indigenous peoples and wild animals. Payne believes that "[i]n such a world animals reveal things to each other, and even occasionally to people like me: their attention to us is commensurate with ours to them." This book will make a wonderful addition to the library of any animal lover or of anyone fascinated by intra- and interspecies communication. Maps and drawing by Laura Payne. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I read this book before departing for Thailand to study elephants. It is a disturbing book, but I recommend it. We need to treat these noble beasts better and it's not easy considering their size and how much they must consume in a day. It all got me started on a quest to learn more about Elephants. We found several elephant rescue camps in Thailand that use tourist money to acquire urban elephants and ones that are used in Berma for logging...very bad for their backs. We signed up for three days where we would have our own elephant and would have to care for it. I found myself bonding with my Minoy, a large female that was assigned to me. It's hard to believe, but she bonded with me as well. When I left there was a very large tear in her eye. Elephants are amazing animals. This book was helpful to me in understanding how elephants communicate. I could feel them "talkin" to each other through my legs, but could not hear the subsonic messages.

What a brilliant book. I loved reading about Katy Payne's experiences. I feel deeply moved by her point of view. Not only was it educational and informative, her expression touches the heart deeply. Thank you Katy for a wonderful inspiring book, sharing your experiences with these majestic beings, giving us insight into their habits and behavior.

Who knew that elephants are so sensitive to sound frequencies far below what our ears can detect? Not only that, they have some kind of telepathic connection as well. These gentle giants are extremely emotional, loyal, passionate and compassionate towards one another. They form tight family bonds and grieve for their dead. They are so endangered they could become extinct within a decade. I hope this kind of illuminating research will make the world aware of the critical danger elephants face, and take steps to ensure their survival. there's the World Wildlife Fund, and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, among many. And the iWorry campaign has petitions to sign to stop the illegal poaching of elephants for their tusks.

I was introduced to Ms Payne through an interview with her on a podcast and I was fascinated by

her story. This book filled in many of the pieces. Its beautiful in its observations and it is an interesting view about the life of a scientist studying among locals. I really enjoyed this.

Awesome book! I recommend it to anyone who loves animals and cares about preserving wildlife. The author's experiences are a fascinating read (including a hair-raising stare-down encounter with a lion), and her insights into elephant behavior and communication will change the way you think about the non-human beings who share our planet.

Did you know that elephants communicate with sounds that are below the range of human hearing? Similar to whales, they can speak over long distance with each other using infrasound. I can't help but wonder if their infrasonic vocalizations are what contribute to the palpable energetic vibrations I felt, sitting amongst the clusters of elephants in Northern Kenya. Katy Payne is one of the elephant researchers in Amboseli Park, Kenya, that helped to discover the infrasonic rumbles of elephant communication (along with Joyce Poole and Cynthia Moss) during the late 1980's and early 1990's. She is also an eloquent writer with a passion for the elephants she studied for many years. In *Silent Thunder: In the Presence of Elephants*, she shares some facinating stories of what it's like to be in the bush with wild elephants...and one gripping story of an encounter with a lion. Her personal accounts hint of her strong intuitive gifts, where she touches on her precognitive dreams. She stops short of using direct language on some of these topics, which left me longing to hear more of what the real Katy Payne is all about. But I applaud her for bringing up spiritual topics at all. It's unusual for a scientific researcher to make personal revelations. I found it refreshing that she did.

I chose this because I love elephants and am deeply concerned they will not be on this earth much longer. Katy Payne has done enormous work studying them, but it's been 13 years since she published this book. Thousands of elephants have been slaughtered by poachers for the ivory trade, including many she studied. It makes me sick to read about them.

Elephants sense so much of the world that's below our hearing, and their understanding must form the basis for their family and social lives. We can learn a great deal from them, Katie Payne helps us do that. Her patient observations and her dedication are truly inspiring.

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