

**To learn more...**

*Exotic Invaders* by Jeanne M. Lesinski (Walker and Company, 1996) includes impressive photographs

*Toad Overload* by Patricia Seibert (The Millbrook Press, 1996) tells another tale of a different alien species run amok

*Mussels, Hard-Shell Mollusks* by Andreu Llamas (Secrets of the Animal World series, Gareth Stevens, 1997) provides a thorough introduction to mussel biology

*Web sites*

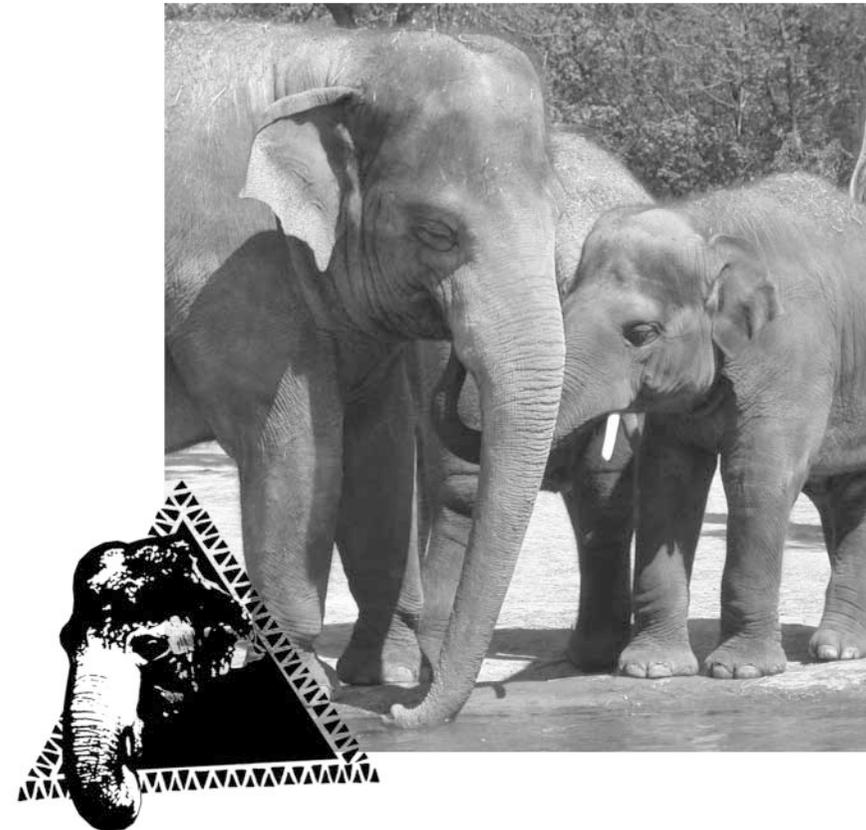
<http://sun.science.wayne.edu/~jram/zmussel.htm> (great slide show and links)

<http://seagrant.wisc.edu/greatlakes/glnetwork/exotics.html> (other alien species)

[www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~earthsys/zebra.html](http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~earthsys/zebra.html) (OSU's interactive zebra mussel quiz)

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## Ohio's Elephants



*Did you know that Ohio has a permanent population of elephants? As I drive around the state, I sometimes see them out of the corner of my eye, marching down the side roads. (Just kidding, just kidding!) Now, read on for the truth.*

**R**emember that woolly mammoth back in Chapter 2? Remember what he did to those Ohioans who came after him with spears? He stomped the stuffing out of them!

Well, things have changed. Elephants don't roam freely in Ohio anymore. And Ohioans don't hunt them. But elephants do live here. Ohio has a permanent population of about 15 pachyderms. (That's a funny-sounding word for thick-skinned, non-ruminant ungulates. What? I mean *elephants!*) Don't worry. You won't stumble onto a herd of them out in the country somewhere. Not yet anyway (see Chapter 13, *The Wilds*). Ohio's elephants all live in zoos located in Toledo, Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati.

As of 2002, the youngest Ohio elephant lives in Cincinnati. And he is the most famous one, too, by far. Why? Because at 4:50 a.m. on March 15, 1998, he became the first elephant to be conceived and born in Ohio since the days of the woolly mammoths. That spring day marked the first time in more than 10,000 years that a newborn baby elephant blinked at Ohio sunlight and sniffed Ohio air.

It was a very big deal. Thousands crowded into the zoo to catch a glimpse of him. As soon as he was ready to meet the public, our family went and waited in a long line just to see this newborn baby. He was three feet tall and awfully cute, with his long eyelashes, kindly gaze and all that fuzzy hair. He could walk almost right away but he was careful to stay very close to his mom.

This newborn elephant made news all over the world. It's very difficult for zoo elephants to have babies. No one knows just why. For some reason, it's much easier for elephants to have babies when they live in herds, in the wild. So when this 213-pound zoo baby came along, he made a big splash.

The zoo had a contest asking people to name the newborn. There were thousands of entries. Finally, the baby elephant's name was announced. He would be called Ganesh.

So why'd the zoo choose that name? Ganesh is a much beloved god in the Hindu religion, practiced by almost 800 million people throughout the world, especially in India. The story of Ganesh is long and involved, and somewhere along the way, the god found that his normal human head had been replaced by the head of an elephant. The great elephant-headed Ganesh is the god of knowledge and is very wise. He is called upon at the beginning of anything important—starting a trip, arranging a wedding or taking a test in school. If you follow the Hindu faith and you want your dreams to come true, you must have Ganesh on your side. Hindus are very fond of Ganesh and his long curving trunk, tusky smile, pot-belly and big flappy ears. Since this Cincinnati newborn was an Indian elephant and he represented the beginning of something very important, the name fit.

Oddly enough, Ohioans can see a statue of this Hindu god over the main entrance to the farmhouse at Malabar Farm State Park (see Chapter 11, Louis Bromfield's *Amazing Pig*). The owner of the farm wasn't Hindu, but he must have wanted Ganesh on his side.

Ganesh, the baby elephant, has gotten on very well since we first saw him. Every time we visit the zoo, we're amazed to see how much he's grown. And he will probably live to enjoy another 50 or 60 years.

In the zoo, he will be safe. In the wild, lions and hyenas often kill and eat baby elephants. But baby elephants' fiercest enemies are the poachers who shoot their mothers for their meat and for

their ivory tusks. And in some countries humans have destroyed or taken over the elephants' territory and left them with little to eat and even less to feed their babies.

All his life Ganesh will have plenty to eat. From day one he sucked gallons of perfectly formulated milk straight from his mother. When he's full grown he may eat—every day!—300 pounds of new plant shoots, green leaves, fruit, grass, tree branches and soft bark. And he may drink 50 gallons of water a day. (How many full bathtubs is that?) He may grow to be 10 feet tall and may weigh as much as three tons.

Everything about Ganesh is amazing, even the bottoms of his feet. They're covered with thick pads so that, if he wants to, he can tiptoe very quietly. And I'm told that on hot summer days Ganesh sweats only one place—around his toenails! Honest!

Don't worry about his getting too hot, though. His leathery ears will help keep him cool. And they'll help him tune into many sounds that are too low for human ears to hear. He will use his ears more than his eyes to learn about his world.

But the number-one thing he will use for exploring is his amazing trunk. He'll use it for smelling, touching, picking up food and for sucking up water to hose into his mouth when he's thirsty. He'll use it to give himself a shower of water or a puff of dust. Right from the start, his trunk has been packed with thousands and thousands of small muscles. His trunk will grow to be a very useful power tool, helping him lift a whole tree if he wants to. Yet Ganesh will also be able to handle tiny things with his trunk, things as delicate as a blade of grass. He'll become so skillful that, with his trunk alone, he will be able to pick up a single peanut, crack it open, blow away the shell and eat just the kernels.

He'll use his trunk to greet other elephants. It's sweet to think that elephants say hello to one another with their noses. They touch each other's mouths with the tips of their trunks. And when some loud noise scares them a little, something like firecrackers on the 4th of July or a truck backfiring on a nearby street, an elephant will put its trunk into another elephant's mouth to let them know that they don't need to worry. It's their way of saying that everything is okay.

But for now Ganesh is still a little kid, and mainly he is busy playing. He wrestles, pretends to fight and plays tag. He likes to splash in the water just as human children do.

The other elephants care about Ganesh and they all help in raising him. They teach him what to eat and how to eat. They show him how to bathe and roll in the mud to protect his skin from the hot sun. He learns from them not to fear the zookeepers. The older elephants are always nearby, protecting Ganesh from danger, imparting elephant wisdom and letting him know that everything really is okay. Maybe they want Ganesh to grow up and, like his Hindu namesake, offer protection and blessings to the next generation of Ohio-born elephants.



**To learn more...**

*Elephants* by Karen Dudley (Raintree Steck-Waughn 1997)

*Elephants* by Annette Barkhausen and Franz Geiser (Gareth Stevens, 1994)

*Elephant* by Ian Redmond (Eyewitness Books, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993)

*Little Orphan Elephants* by Ellen Lambeth, in *Ranger Rick*, July 2001; vol. 35 (7), pp 4-9

*In the Wild: Elephants* by Claire Robinson (Heinemann, 1997)

*The Elephant-Headed God and Other Hindu Tales* by Debjani Chatterjee (Oxford University Press, 1992)

*The Complete Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling (Viking, 1993) includes the classic tale of how the elephant got its trunk in "The Elephant's Child"

Visit Ohio pachyderms at these locations:

The Columbus Zoo, telephone (614) 645-3550 or log on [www.colszoo.org](http://www.colszoo.org)

The Cincinnati Zoo, telephone (513) 281-4700 or 1-800-94-HIPPO or log on [www.cincyzoo.org](http://www.cincyzoo.org)

The Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, telephone (216) 661-6500 or log on [www.clemetzoo.com](http://www.clemetzoo.com)

The Toledo Zoo, telephone (419) 385-5721 or log on [www.toledozoo.org](http://www.toledozoo.org)

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## Ohio Bird Sanctuary



*I admire people who help animals, especially injured animals. The animals will never say "Thank you!" to these people. They can't, of course. But I can. This story is my way of thanking all those good people.*