

# All-nighters for elephants: They get only two hours of shut-eye a night

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A not-so-sleepy African elephant in eastern Zambia, Africa. Photo from: Wolfgang Kaehler/LightRocket via Getty Images.

A new study says that elephants in the wild do not get much sleep. They snooze for only two hours a night, scientists said. This is not much sleep at all. It seems elephants sleep less than any other mammal.

## Tracking Elephants' Activity

The scientists studied two wild elephants in Africa. They put motion trackers on the elephants' trunks. GPS collars went around their necks. The scientists used these tools to track the elephants. They watched the elephants' activity for 35 days.

Scientist Paul Manger worked on the study. He said that the trunk is the most mobile and active part of the elephant. It gave the researchers important clues about the elephant's sleep habits. If the trunk is still for five minutes or more, he said, the elephant is probably asleep.



## Just Two Hours Of Shut-Eye A Day

The study found that elephants often slept just two hours a day! Shut-eye usually came between 2 a.m. and 6 a.m. It was not sunrise and sunset that decided bedtime, though. Instead, it was things like temperature and the dampness in the air.

Sometimes the two elephants slept standing up. Other times, they slept lying down. They seemed to prefer sleeping standing up, though. They laid down to sleep only every three or four days. When they did, they only slept for about an hour.

## Good Memories Even Without Much Deep Sleep

This sleep pattern indicates that elephants do not get much deep sleep. Deep sleep is known as rapid eye movement (REM) sleep. During REM sleep, our bodies are calm. This is when we dream. Scientists think REM sleep improves our memory.

This study may change that thinking. Scientists say that elephants do not need REM sleep the way humans do. Studies show that elephants have very good long-term memories. That means they remember things for a long time.

The study also suggests something else. It may mean that elephants do not dream very much when they sleep.



### **Almost Two Full Days Without Sleeping At All**

The elephants' sleep was unaffected by their daily activity. Sometimes they walked long distances during the day. This did not seem to make them more tired, though. After a long walk, the elephants did not sleep more the next night. In fact, on five occasions, the elephants went almost two full days without sleeping at all.

Zoo elephants may sleep more than wild elephants do. Studies show that they snooze four to six hours a night. Like wild elephants, they may sleep standing up or lying down.