

E-Mail from Maisie Ettinger

One handy thing about bonobos is that they often tell you if there are other animals around that you should look out for. This is handy in a forest of leopards and Gabon vipers. I've seen them scream at snakes and shake trees at wild hogs, but sometimes they also freeze and go silent, listening intently to some unknown sound. Often when they go quiet it's only for a few moments before dismissing the threat and carrying on with their day. So when the eight females Nico (another research assistant) and I were following went all quiet and still, we listened too, but expected a false alarm. This time however, the bonobos stayed quiet and when something very large moved in a nearby vegetation patch Nico and I glanced at each other, part excited, part nervous. The next moment there is a huge trumpet sound and chaos ensues. Nico and



Maisie wears one of the Bonobo Alive T-shirts showing the portrait of Zoe, the same female that is resting together with her daughter Zaina (3 years) on the forest floor just behind Maisie.

I leg it, and most of the bonobos flee up trees, all the while shrieking, except for Olga, who is running along beside me, baby Orly clinging to her back. I glanced over my shoulder to see a huge outline of an elephant charging towards where we had been standing, but the thick forest made running and looking backwards pretty difficult so I didn't see much more. After about 100 m or so, Olga stopped, and assuming she's got a better grasp of the situation than me in my adrenaline-fueled flight, I thought the Ellie was probably not chasing after me.

Nico called to me from about 50 m away, having run in a slightly different direction, and we wandered back to the bonobos. It seemed that the elephant had mocked charged us and the bonobos were pretty unabashed, already descending and continuing in the same direction they had been going; straight into the elephant's vegetation patch.

The Haumania, a terrestrial herb that grows in the understory of the forest was dense and tall enough that we couldn't see more than a few feet and it is really amazing how quietly elephants can move through dense forest. A little nervously but trusting the bonobos calmness we followed them in and for once didn't have to hack or crawl our way through - we had a nice wide elephant avenue to follow. Just to top off an excellent day in the forest the bonobos moved straight to a feeding tree less than 1 km from camp, where they fed for a couple of hours and then nested very early, apparently worn out from all the excitement. So Nico and I were back in camp in time to have our bucket showers in the last of the day light (a rare luxury) and to retell our elephant close-encounter which had taken place only 700 m from camp.