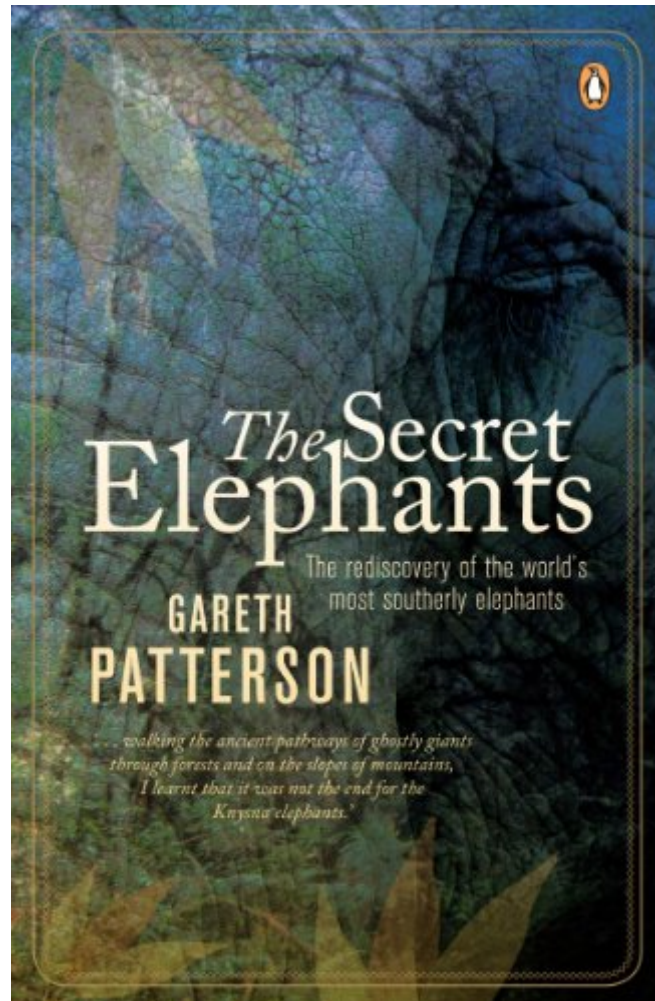




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The Secret Elephants



Synopsis

The elephants of the Knysna forest have long been the subject of mystery and conjecture. Over the years they have taken on an almost mythical quality, with many doubting whether they existed at all. In 1994 the local forestry department maintained that there was only one surviving Knysna elephant, the seldom seen female known as The Matriarch. The Knysna elephant was thus described as 'functionally extinct'. This was the official stance until September 2000 when forest guard Wilfred Oraai encountered and photographed a young bull from a distance of some thirty metres. The question arose: who was its mother? And, indeed, who was its father? In 2001 Gareth Patterson began an independent study of the Knysna elephant. For the next seven years he covered thousands of kilometres on foot, following ancient elephant paths through the dense Afromontane forest and the surrounding mountain fynbos. He found abundant signs to suggest that, far from dying out, the Knysna elephants are, quietly and secretly, holding their own. Patterson's fieldwork, and his dna research in collaboration with conservation geneticist Lori Eggert, established that at least five young females exist, lending support to Patterson's growing evidence that the Knysna forest and its surroundings are home to a small herd of young elephants. The Secret Elephants is the story of these remarkable animals that fought their way back from the brink of extinction without any help from humankind.

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Customer Reviews

I was already familiar with the Knysna elephants and found this book absolutely fascinating. Patterson's experiences with these elusive elephants make interesting reading, although as with so many elephant books there are a few heartbreaking moments. I enjoyed his writing enough so that I'm going to investigate his lion-related books.

This wonderful book is a treasure of information on elephants in the Knysna Forest at the southern tip of Africa. It was thought there may be only one elephant left in this vast forest, but Gareth Patterson's years of persistence and research on site, proved otherwise. A truly remarkable book that will break your heart, at the same time it raises your hopes, for these beautiful gray ghosts. Having spent years and years hiding from and evading the enemy (yes, that would be man), these beautiful, gentle beasts moved further and further into this remote area, where over decades, those left were forced to adjust their natural habits, breeding, and diet to adapt to what could be considered an almost alien area for these animals. Although Gareth Patterson is known more for his research and conservation work with lions, he certainly left no stone unturned during his seven years of work on this project for the elephants of Knysna Forest. Definitely worth reading if you're interested in learning more about elephants and the challenges they have always faced and that continue today.

If you like books that have a profound impact, then you'll enjoy *The Secret Elephants* tremendously. This is a wonderful, soulful story about Gareth Patterson's latest journey that took him into the Knysna forest to research what was originally thought to be a doomed population of forest elephants. The story of these elephants is told with great empathy and heart, about the effects of colonialism that nearly drove this elephant population to extinction, and also resulted in the mass slaughter of local indigenous tribes. I experienced a variety of emotions while reading *The Secret Elephants* including anger, deep sadness and empathy, in addition to being continually inspired by Gareth and the message of hope that he carries. This book is truly a treat and I recommend it to anyone concerned about wildlife, sustainability and our world.

Gareth Patterson knows the Knysna forest and its precious elephants. He is a naturalist who took the time to live intimately in the forest and to be present to the ways of elephants without getting in their ways of living. He is also profoundly descriptive of his experiences, and in telling the history of the forest elephants. Thank you so much.

Gareth's latest book, an amazing insight to his quest to prove the existence of these amazing elephants, said to be extinct for so long. Gareth writes from the heart and this book is another evocative account of his life with the wildlife he loves, at times heartbreaking and yet the story fills you with hope for the future. A must read.

Fascinating tale of discovery - a seven year adventure into the (re)discovery of a herd of elephants hidden from the view of most people who live alongside of them. Well written in the style of a gentle walk through the forests and hillsides of the Cape. Heart warming to all who care for our threatened elephants.

Bought this as a gift for our daughter. She is just thrilled. Thank You

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