

# The Elephant Parade Launches in London

BY MONIQUE JESSEN | WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2010 4:08 PM ET

**The Duchess of York, patron of the Elephant Family charity says we must act now to save the endangered Asian elephants from extinction.**



London will play host to a herd of elephants this summer — 250 of them to be exact.

Life-size baby elephant sculptures, each uniquely decorated by leading artists and fashion designers are to be scattered around central London in May as part of a fundraising effort to save the elephants in Asia.

Billed as "London's biggest outdoor arts event," the parade has been two years in the making by UK charity, **Elephant Family** which launched the event with a glamorous cocktail party on Tuesday

night. Hosted by founder Mark Shand (brother to Prince Charles's wife Camilla Parker Bowles) and patrons, the Duchess of York, Tanaz Dizadji and Sir Evelyn de Rothschild, they urged guests to contribute in any way they can.

Conservationist and travel author, **Mark Shand** welcomed guests to the private residence in London's Covent Garden by announcing "it's all about selling elephants!" to a packed room of champagne sipping friends and colleagues before declaring that there were still 50 elephants up for grabs. Shand took a moment out of his hosting duties to tell Tonic about his love of elephants and why he's so passionate about saving them from extinction. "I went to India 40 years ago and bought an elephant called Tara and quite simply, that's where it all started," he revealed, adding: "I have been doing this work for 20 years now — it's very important to me."

It was while writing a travel book in India that Shand met his beloved Tara, an emaciated elephant who needed urgent loving care. With her ribcage showing and her skin hanging in loose folds, the author decided to adopt her and bring the elephant back to health. In return, she let him ride her through India, the story of which he later published in his book *Travels on my Elephant*, which is going to be made into a film. Asked about Tara now, Shand smiled, clearly still smitten: "Yes she is still alive and doing well," he said. The charity's newest patron, Tanaz Dizadji who is also their Head of Arts and Education for the Parade can certainly attest to that, having recently been to India with Shand to visit Tara and see the charity's work. "It was an amazing trip and I feel so honored to be part of this project," she told Tonic. "To think that my children might not be able to see these beautiful elephants in India is frightening."

A long-standing **patron of several British charities**, the Duchess of York is particularly passionate about her involvement with the Elephant Family. "It is something very close to my heart," she told Tonic after giving a speech at the party with her daughters Beatrice and Eugenie by her side. "I've been to Asia and seen how badly these elephants are treated, being hit on the back of the ear all day long. We have to stop that cruelty and do something now otherwise the next generation of children will only know about elephants from books."

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In the last 100 years, the Asian elephant population has plummeted from 250,000 to just 25,000 with 70% of those losses occurring in the last ten years. With loss of habitat being the primary threat to the elephants, their forest homes are being cleared at such a rate that by 2050, elephants could cease to exist. "Everyone thinks it's the elephants who are being the nuisance when really we're the nuisance, as we're putting houses in their way," explains the Duchess, alongside a black glossy elephant, inspired by the famous London taxi — with solar headlamps for eyes and an orange 'Taxi' sign on it's forehead (above, left).

Designers offering a creative hand to the project include Matthew Williamson, Lulu Guinness, Tommy Hilfiger, Paul Smith, Diane von Furstenberg, Julien Macdonald, John Rocha, Alice Temperley and Issa's Daniella Helayel while artists Jack Vettriano and Marc Quinn have put their paintbrush to good work for the cause. British designer, Lulu Guinness decided to symbolize her love for elephants by covering her sculpture in red kisses. "He looks as though he's been attacked in a kissing frenzy," Lulu Guinness told **Vogue.com**

at a press conference for the event earlier that morning. "I genuinely love elephants and have met lots of them — their eyes are so mesmeric," she added.

The **Elephant Parade London 2010** will spring into action on May 3 when all 250 elephants will suddenly appear across the capital's most prestigious landmarks including Buckingham Palace and Parliament Square. Overnight on June 29, the elephants will vanish completely and in their place will be a plaque with a phone number for people to call and donate money. The event will culminate with a celebrity auction, the following night, hosted by Sotheby's and attended by international luminaries such as **Goldie Hawn**.

With 41 days to go until the parade, the charity is aiming to raise \$3 million to benefit 20 conservation charities — all of them fighting to save the elephant from extinction. Let's hope that the stylish baby elephants work their magic on the streets of London so that generations to come can enjoy the beauty of the Asian elephant.

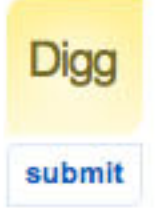
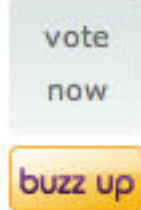
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