# Keeping Elephants Out of the Fields.

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I always imagined that elephant damage to a field was akin to hurricane danger at ECHO it could happen but it might be years before it does.

This view changed a few years ago when I visited Kristin Kroll at her Food for the Hungry project in Marsabit, Kenya. Her experimental plot of Buhrow's white desert sweet corn had been destroyed just before my visit. (It had been doing well and was almost ready to harvest, by the way). If I recall correctly, elephant damage was so prevalent that people seldom bothered growing crops. Elephants also can be dangerous. Two farmers and a little girl had been killed in the past year, I was told, when they accidentally came across elephants after dark.

Kristin was able to obtain a grant for an electric fence, which I understand admirably controlled the problem. But what alternatives are available where an electric fence is too expensive or might be stolen?

A Mennonite missionary told me that some 70 years ago in Tanzania the British government wanted to keep elephants north of an area where crops were grown. It was bounded on two sides by two large bodies of water, I believe he said about 30 miles apart. The government constructed a trench approximately 4 feet wide and 4 feet deep between the two bodies of water. Elephants reportedly are so large that they will not try to cross such a trench.

I mentioned this to Harrison Akabala from Kenya who recently visited ECHO. His face brightened and he said, "That is how farmers near the river keep hippopotamuses from their fields. They dig trenches."

Do any of our readers have firsthand knowledge of this technique, and how well it works, or of the old project in Tanzania? Someone told me that elephants will fill in a trench to cross to the other side. I can also imagine that if the land is sloping, the trenches could cause erosion. And if the land is flat, they might fill with water and lead to mosquitoborn diseases or bilharzia. This is a problem I never expect to face at ECHO, so I would love to hear from those with experience. (See EDN 181 for another method to keep elephants from the garden.)

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