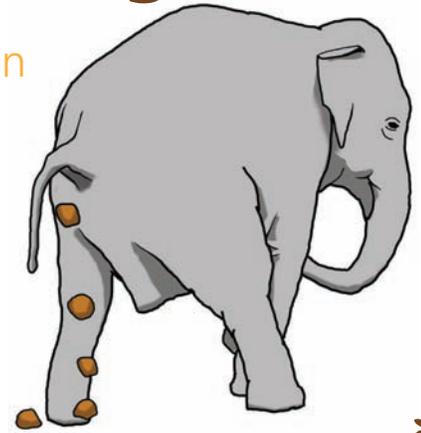


Educational Use of Elephant Dung

A surprising tool for conservation education



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Animal droppings may not be the first choice for a teaching material,



but elephant dung has excellent qualities that make it suitable for creating fun, interactive activities. Elephant dung is practically odorless and safe to handle, once it has dried outdoors for a few days, and the rich content of energy and undigested fibers makes it ideal for a wide range of purposes. Copenhagen Zoo has had with “fun with dung” since the opening of our new elephant house in 2008. Here’s how:

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Dung Detectives

To determine if elephants are in estrus, Copenhagen Zoo keepers collect and send off dung for analysis. Each female is given seeds in their morning feed (wheat, maize, oat or barley). Due to the relatively inefficient digestion of elephants, the seeds pass intact through their digestion system—dung can thusly be connected to an individual elephant by examining what type of seed it contains.

With zero expenses you can utilize elephant dung to create a workshop where kids can test their detective skills and incorporate learning about elephant feeding and digestion! Simply supply visitors with rubber gloves and let them have fun with the detective work of identifying the elephant dung.





Dung Paper

Elephant dung is full of undigested plant fibers and is an excellent substrate for paper production. Zoo staff prepare pulp in advance by boiling and blending the dung. At the workshop, guests are guided on how to sieve and press the dung into paper. After three minutes in a microwave oven, guests create their very own piece of homemade dung paper. Paper production is an excellent forum for learning a concrete method of recycling, as well as discussing the special dietary needs of megaherbivores.

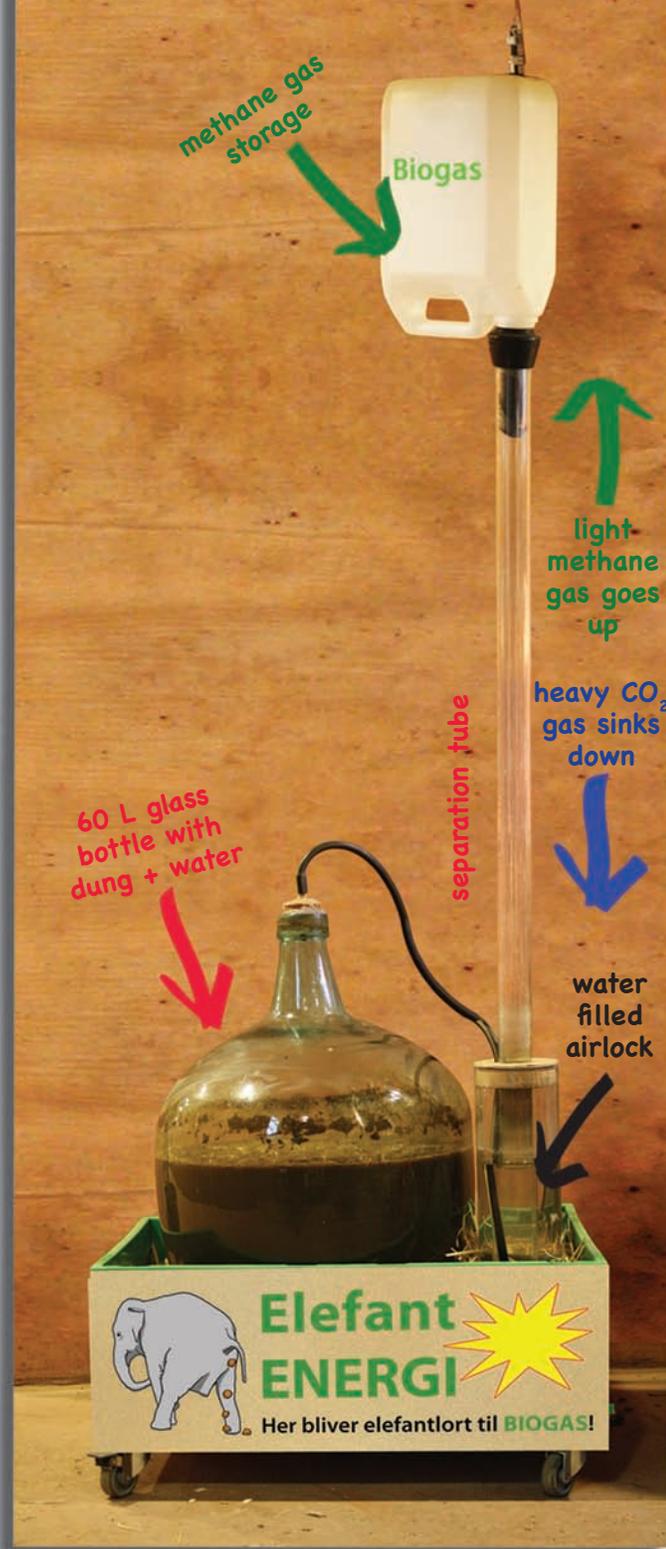
The inexpensive but popular workshop allows guests to make and own a unique product. Outside the park, the story continues since kids show the paper to friends and family and even bring it to school for show and tell.



Dung Fire

Dry elephant dung is excellent firewood and a dung fire provides a spectacular beacon for a workshop. We let our guests prepare popcorn or pancakes over the fire, while we have a talk about why elephant dung is such an efficient fuel.

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Biogas

Elephant dung works nicely as a biogas substrate. Even though your zoo may not have a large-scale biogas facility, you can still teach about recycling and methane production by creating a functional miniature biogas plant.

At Copenhagen Zoo, we've built a cheap, simple and functional miniature biogas plant, largely made of glass, so that guests can investigate the process at close hand. Education officers give demonstrations where children can learn about the biogas idea and see the actual use of it as we burn small quantities of methane at the end of each program in order to demonstrate the potency of methane as an energy source.



Get Started!

Combine hands-on experiences with fun items guests can take home and you are on your way to creating a successful workshop! Elephants provide an inexhaustible supply of a material that's well suited for a wide range of activities. With minimal expense, guests learn about the feeding and digestion of megaherbivores and much more—plus, you will get them involved in recycling and production of paper and biogas.

Start your own unforgettable conservation program with the simple tools discussed here and give your guests a look behind the world of elephants like they've never seen before!

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