

ISSUE NO. 19

SPEND 2016

BLOOMBERG PUTS



THE GIVING SEASON

Model and activist Doutzen Kroes on the cause that changed her life

Pursue

Role

Mo

Dutch
supermodel
Doutzen Kroes
has spent the
past decade
rising to the
top of her
industry. Now
she's on to the
next challenge:
Giving back

By
Caroline Winter

Photographs by
Ruven Afanador

Styling by
Brian Coats

del



+
Jacket by
Michael Kors,
ring by Aurate
New York

Shot on
location at
75 Wall Street
in New York

ELE PHA NTS

can weigh as much as 15,500 pounds each, but you won't necessarily hear them coming—the soft tissue in the animal's enormous platelike feet acts like a shock absorber. "They're almost completely silent," says Dutch model Doutzen Kroes, recalling her first encounter with elephants in the wild.

Instead of footsteps, their approach is more likely signaled by snapping branches or the low, rumbling noises they sometimes use to communicate. When the animals finally appear, Kroes says it's an emotional experience. "They've been around for millions and millions of years, and they're so big, and then you see these tiny, friendly eyes."

Kroes is sipping a cappuccino in the lobby of the Mercer Hotel in SoHo, nerding out about wildlife. Although she just got off a plane at JFK from Amsterdam, where she lives with her husband and two young children, the 31-year-old is as stunning in person as she is in an airbrushed campaign. She started modeling in 2003, when she sent a few of her holiday photos to Paparazzi Model Management in the Netherlands. She's been a face of L'Oréal since 2006, and in 2008, Victoria's Secret signed her as one of its "angels." She's been ranked among the five highest-earning models in the world ever since.

This year, though, has marked something of a turning point in her career. In September, Kroes introduced Knot On My Planet, a campaign to help save elephants from extinction. Enlisting the help of celebrity friends such as Leonardo DiCaprio, along with most—if not all—of the world's top models, she helped the Elephant Crisis Fund, a group that puts 100 percent of donations toward stopping the illegal ivory trade, reach \$10 million this year. "We tie a knot when we don't want to forget," Kroes says, explaining the campaign's slogan. "We've been forgetting the elephants, and if we don't do something now, they will disappear."

It started in January, when she first visited the Elephant Watch Camp in Kenya with her husband, Sunnery James, and their 5-year-old son, Phyllon Joy Gorré. There, local Samburu warriors in beaded jewelry drove them into the wild, where they watched a herd of about 40 elephants pass by. "My husband was almost sitting in my lap because some of the elephants are so big," she says, laughing. "At one point, there was a little elephant that stuck his trunk inside the car and felt around."

Elephants, Kroes learned, are a lot like humans. They reach puberty around the same age we do, spend years learning from their elders, and can live into their 60s. They're intelligent and contemplative, have close-knit families, and are

known to care for their sick and dead. They're also vital to their habitat, distributing seeds and maintaining ecological balance. "If you save elephants, you automatically save other animals, too," she says. "Lions, rhinos, giraffes."

According to the Elephant Crisis Fund, there are an estimated 415,000 elephants left in Africa. In the three years from 2010 to 2012, poachers killed about 100,000, and today the organization estimates that an elephant is killed every 30 minutes for its tusks. "They're killing them for their ivory faster than they can reproduce," says Iain Douglas-Hamilton, the godfather of elephant research and founder of Save the Elephants, a conservation charity in Kenya. In countries such as Tanzania and Mozambique, populations have dropped 60 percent in the past four years. And in Central Africa, elephant populations have plummeted. "According to some statistics, the rate of killings appears to be falling," says Douglas-Hamilton, who's been studying the mammals since the 1960s. "But this is not a good sign. It's a sign that there are fewer elephants that are easy prey for poachers."

Kroes, a born activist, has always been passionate about animals. Growing up in Friesland, a rural province in the northern Netherlands, she owned two black cats and three Stabij dogs (including one named Sybil, after the character in *Fawlty Towers*). Her favorite book was *Wise Child* by Monica Furlong, about an orphan raised by a sorceress who has an enormous garden. "I always thought I'd be like that woman, living in nature," Kroes says. She also refused to go to the zoo, because she hated seeing animals in captivity, and staged a protest against the French after hearing they were performing nuclear tests in the ocean. "I told my mom I didn't want to eat Boursin anymore—you know, the French cheese?" she recalls. "Of course, the Boursin factory couldn't help what was going on, but for me it was a metaphor. I was always ready to act."

The connection between fashion and elephants isn't so far-fetched. Richard Avedon's 1955 portrait of *Vogue* model



Kroes in Kenya for the Knot On My Planet campaign

“Elephants have
always been in our
pictures,” Kroes
says. “It was time for
the fashion industry
to give back”

Dovima posing between two circus elephants has become one of the most iconic photographs of the 20th century. “Elephants have always been in our pictures,” Kroes says. “They’ve stood there, silent, in the background. It was time for the fashion industry to give back.”

To get started on Knot On My Planet, Kroes flew back to Kenya for a photo shoot—a somewhat dangerous affair, because elephants are more likely to charge tourists who get out of their vehicles. Douglas-Hamilton’s daughter Saba was there to help. She runs the Elephant Watch Camp, about a 10-hour drive north from Tsavo National Park. Saba told Kroes to act like a chimpanzee when she got out of the car—“to get on all fours and walk over to a tree and stand up slowly,” Kroes recalls. “I could hear the elephants rumbling behind me, and of course they were curious, because nobody ever gets out of the car.” In what became the main campaign photo, Doutzen is tying a knot in her army green button-up shirt, with elephants in the background.

Next, she began texting and calling her friends, asking them to take part in a social media campaign. “We had all the top models—Gigi, Karlie, Gisele,” says David Bonnouvrier, Kroes’s agent at DNA Model Management, whom she credits with alerting her to the elephant crisis and tapping her to spearhead the campaign.

Even the Holy Trinity—Naomi Campbell, Linda Evangelista, and Christy Turlington—got involved, posing for a Knot On My Planet picture, the first time the three had been photographed together since 1989. “It gave such a boost to our campaign,” Kroes says. To thank her forbearers, she brought them all flowers on set.

DiCaprio, a longtime elephant activist who recently made a documentary about the illegal ivory trade, also donated about \$1 million. And Tiffany & Co., along with a generous gift, created a digital campaign that screened in Times Square. Victoria’s Secret gave Kroes four VIP tickets to its fashion show in December, which she auctioned off for \$250,000.

“We reached 1.4 billion people through social media,” Bonnouvrier says. All kinds of people joined in, including women wearing traditional garb in Tanzania and Dave Mustaine, lead singer of heavy metal band Megadeth, who tied a knot in one of his guitar strings. “We

got really chunky guys with their bellies out tying knots in their shirts like Doutzen,” Bonnouvrier says.

It’s the rare social media campaign that’s achieved real-world goals. “The reason we need Doutzen and the models is, this is not a war that can be won in a military-style confrontation in the parks of Africa,” says Frank Pope, Saba Douglas-Hamilton’s husband and chief operating officer of Save the Elephants. “This is a challenge that requires a global solution for the world to come together and fight traffickers. We need the 1.4 billion people who saw that campaign to put pressure on politicians to do more.”

“Countries do listen to celebrities in the right cause, and this has been particularly true in China and America,” Iain Douglas-Hamilton says. After Chinese basketball star Yao Ming and Chinese actress Li Bingbing made impassioned public service announcements denouncing the ivory trade, he says, China and the U.S. pledged to shut down their ivory markets. Kroes is already planning the next Knot On My Planet initiatives. “The hard part will be keeping the campaign alive,” she says. One plan she’s discussed with Pope is naming some of the matriarchal elephants after supermodels.

“It’s a great idea,” Pope says. Researchers already have given monikers to about 1,000 of Africa’s wild elephants, naming them after Princess Diana, Eleanor Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, and Chuck Yeager to help them keep track. Pope says once you’ve gotten to know the various elephants, observing them in the field “is like watching a soap opera.” To name some after supermodels, he says, they’ll first have to find a new family of elephants.

Kroes, for one, would be delighted. Smiling, she says, “Then maybe when people go on tours to see the elephants, they’ll say, ‘Oh, look. There’s Doutzen!’” ☺

WHAT TO KNOW

The Elephant Crisis Fund gives 100 percent of proceeds to a coalition of organizations that combat poaching, smuggling, and demand for ivory. It also aids research and conservation efforts. The Knot On My Planet campaign has helped raise \$10 million toward a \$15 million goal by 2018.

WHERE TO STAY

The Elephant Watch Camp, an ecoluxury resort in the Samburu National Reserve in Kenya. Founded by Oria Douglas-Hamilton, the camp is run by her daughter Saba. “It’s one of my favorite places in the world,” Kroes says. “I’m planning to go back in January with my family. It’s a perfect way to recharge and remember what’s important in life.”

From \$765 per person per day, plus park fees; elephantwatchportfolio.com. All-inclusive three-day packages from \$6,146 per couple; africatravelresource.com

WHAT TO WATCH

Leonardo DiCaprio’s documentary, *The Ivory Game*, which made its debut Nov. 4 on Netflix, details illegal poaching practices and the global ivory trade.

HOW TO GIVE

Donate through the website: knotonmyplanet.org.

Contribute your own knot photo and the hashtag on Twitter: #knotonmyplanet.

Learn more about the Elephant Crisis Fund: wildnet.org/wildlife-programs/elephant-crisis-fund.