

[Reid Park Zoo makes Worst Zoos for Elephants list](#)
by [Rynski](#) on Jan.12, 2010

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Connie and Shaba at Reid Park Zoo/Ryn Gargulinski

There are so many reasons to adore Reid Park Zoo – unless you happen to be an elephant.

Tucson’s sweet little animal sanctuary has for the first time ever made the list of one of the [10 Worst Zoos for Elephants](#), according to a press release from In Defense of Animals, the group that compiles the list.

This annual list has been going on for six years and “exposes the hidden suffering of elephants in zoos.” Reid Park Zoo’s two elephants, Connie and Shaba, had a grand new exhibit in the works for some time. But IDA says the zoo is putting the plans on hold thanks to lack of funds. Damn budget.

The [Reid Park Zoo’s website](#) notes an admission increase starting Jan. 19, but there is nothing noted about the elephant exhibit being put on hold. Sawyer is awaiting a response from zoo administrators to fill us in on the possible delay and other info put forth in the IDA release.

If the exhibit is being delayed, Connie and Shaba will be stuck in their current small space rather than roaming around in the much-touted new exhibit.

The IDA explains why Reid Park Zoo made No. 4 on its **Top 10 Worst Zoos for Elephants** list:

Reid Park Zoo (Arizona) – Time to ride off into the sunset

Several years ago, the zoo refused to relocate its elephants, Connie and Shaba, to a sanctuary, at no cost to the zoo or Tucson taxpayers. Instead, the zoo said it would build a new exhibit, to be funded in part by a multi-million dollar bond measure.

Last week, the zoo announced that lack of funds has indefinitely postponed renovation of its tiny elephant exhibit, leaving Connie and Shaba stuck in a measly one-third of an acre yard.

Both elephants suffer from health problems caused by horribly inadequate conditions. Connie has endured painful chronic foot abscesses since at least 1996. At one point, she had an infection in every nail on her feet. Shaba also has a history of foot disorders, which began shortly after she arrived at the zoo at age two. Foot disease is a common cause of death in captive elephants because they do not have the space they need for healthy movement and soft, natural surfaces that promote foot and joint health.

A 2006 IDA survey found that 62 percent of elephants in U.S. zoos suffer foot disease, while 42 percent endure joint disorders. Abnormal behaviors such as Connie’s repetitive swaying only exacerbate these

problems. Lack of space, the misery caused by foot disease, and the zoo's failure to provide better conditions call for bringing an immediate end to the elephants' suffering and the zoo's elephant exhibit.

Eeek.

While many of us love seeing elephants at the zoo, we have to wonder if they enjoy being there. At all. But we bet if we asked any other animal if they particularly liked living in zoo, the response may not be all that positive.

What we do know is Reid Park Zoo has an amazing staff of caring people and many exhibits that keep the animals comfortable and clean.

We also know the city is being crushed by the budget – or lack thereof.

India banned elephants from all of its zoos last year, the IDA release said, and the group encourages North America to follow suit and realize many don't have the space – or money – to properly care for and house these gentle giants.