



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

July 29, 2010

Ms. Justine Brewer, President
Southwick's Zoo
2 Southwick Street
Mendon, MA 01756

Via email: justine@southwickzoo.com

Dear Ms. Brewer,

In Defense of Animals (IDA) shares your sorrow at the tragic death of the elephant Dondi, and we extend our condolences to you, your staff, and the greater Mendon community.

Dondi's unexpected death raises a red flag as, at 36 years old, she should have been in the prime of life. (Asian elephants have a natural lifespan of 60-70 years.) While we recognize that the Southwick's Zoo is a private entity, we request that you publicly release Dondi's veterinary records and necropsy reports. These records are a matter of great public interest to those who cared about Dondi and they can allay any concerns regarding public safety. As you know, Dondi was in direct contact with the public during the rides she gave both at the Southwick's Zoo and, during the winter months, at various locations in Florida. Elephants can harbor diseases transmissible to humans, including tuberculosis, which is a problem in captive-held elephants because it is very difficult to detect.

IDA strongly urges you to not replace Dondi with another elephant. The zoo's tiny exhibit is inadequate for elephants as it lacks the vast space they need for movement, a complex natural environment that challenges their keen minds, and the opportunity for social interaction. Elephants are highly social animals who naturally roam several miles each day and live in large family groups in which females remain with their mothers for life.

Though the zoo may have been well intentioned, Dondi led a sad and unnatural life for an elephant. She was trucked across the country, confined in cramped pens, forced to perform circus tricks and give rides, and lived without the companionship of another elephant. On the zoo's website you assert that Dondi "was not interested" in other elephants. In fact, elephants are so innately social that even those who had been held alone and deemed "anti-social," when introduced to others in a more natural environment such as a sanctuary, very successfully formed the social relationships so important to their welfare.

The public has a right to know the cause of Dondi's death. We hope the zoo will do the right thing and release Dondi's medical records as quickly as possible and refrain from displaying elephants in the future. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

Catherine Doyle
Elephant Campaign Director
323-301-5730