

'Free Maggie' is overwhelming opinion of a sampling of readers
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Treadmill is a degrading instrument

My husband and I lived in Anchorage for six years, leaving in 1990. While living there, we visited Maggie at the Alaska Zoo. Upon hearing of the degrading idea of putting this grand animal on a treadmill, I wrote to the governor's office in Juneau.

I find it so hard to conceive that there has been nothing done to prevent the zoo from doing this to Maggie. Harder yet is the thought that under the guise of caring for animals, the zoo would entertain such a cruel action. To an animal lover, this is certainly animal abuse. I hope someone will care enough to have this matter corrected and allow Maggie the dignity she so deserves.

---- Marlene Breden
Jasper, Ind.

Liberate Maggie before she dies

Maggie is an intelligent, kind creature that has feelings and needs that are not being met by the negligent Alaska Zoo.

The inhumane treatment by her captors shows that zoos are an institution that have outlived their usefulness. The public is more knowledgeable of animals' needs and intelligence than are Maggie's keepers.

Let us free Maggie and shut down zoos.

As so many letters have stated, Maggie is being kept in inhumane and deplorable conditions that are slowly killing her. Such captivity is cruel and inexcusable.

What possible benefit is there to the zoo to continue to abuse this magnificent animal?

Free Maggie before she dies.

---- Molly McGuire
Johnstown, Pa.

Community should contribute too

In response to the recent article about Maggie the African elephant in the Alaska Zoo ("What's best for Maggie?" Jan. 19), zoo board member Marnie Brennan mentions that new flooring should be purchased by outside groups criticizing the zoo for the concrete floor that Maggie stands on, which is potentially harming her. If new flooring is an option, why not put it to Alaskans to help out in purchasing this for Maggie? If the Alaska Zoo is going to say it is best

to keep Maggie here, then we need to be responsible to Maggie by trying to improve her conditions through local support. If the community will not continue to stand up to this challenge, then the decision to send her to another environment that might support her needs better should be made.

---- Jill Klein
Anchorage

Relocation would be too stressful

The Alaska Zoo began with an elephant, an interesting story itself. Is Alaska any place for elephants -- or any less qualified to care for large land mammals? I am betting what "Animal Adventures" TV show host Jack Hanna said when he was up here is the most correct: Relocation is stressful and proximity is educational.

Hey, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, start getting all them other zoos to send back our polar bears; we may run out soon.

---- Timothy Boese
Eagle River

Please, send Maggie to Tennessee

Maggie at the Alaska Zoo desperately needs to be relocated to the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. To keep a highly social and intelligent animal in solitary confinement is cruel and inhumane.

The zoo states it has spent \$1.2 million for upgrades since 2004, but Maggie still languishes on concrete that leads to arthritis, foot disease and an early demise. Also, board member Marnie Brennan states that the public should step up and donate. For what? More grossly inadequate updates that are nowhere near the amount of space an elephant requires. The Alaska Zoo absolutely must realize it cannot properly care for Maggie and should let her live the remainder of her years at the elephant sanctuary.

---- Anna LaChance
Blasdell, N.Y.

Director pretends to see no suffering

The Daily News article "What's best for Maggie?" (Jan. 19) already provides the answer to this question. Maggie, who lives alone, pushes the red ball from one end of her small enclosure to the other. She explores the concrete that surrounds her. They try to get her, an African elephant, to play a harmonica and to use a treadmill. This life was her reward after witnessing her mother being killed in South Africa as a baby.

As Alaska Zoo's curator, Pat Lampi admitted that Maggie would be better off elsewhere when he voted to move the long-suffering

pachyderm to the Lower 48. Now, as zoo director, Lampi has retreated into a see-no-suffering elephant silence.

When will we humans realize that we don't have an automatic right to keep elephants? The Alaska Zoo is even violating the woefully inadequate standards of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. And Maggie's living conditions certainly violate the federal Animal Welfare Act. The Alaska Zoo should voluntarily relinquish Maggie to the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, where she will enjoy a high quality of life in hundreds of acres of natural habitat with other African elephants. If the zoo refuses, the U.S. Department of Agriculture should confiscate Maggie and place her there themselves. Either way, this embarrassing fiasco must end.

---- Nancy Farnam, member
Northwest Animal Rights Network
Edmonds, Wash.

Alaska Zoo is violating its mission

I am disappointed by the comments made by Marnie Brennan, board member for the Alaska Zoo. She states that critics should not judge the zoo and Maggie's living conditions because they are not "providing support or donating money for Maggie." The last time I checked, it was the board's responsibility to make sure that an organization is fiscally sound and following its mission statement.

The Alaska Zoo states on its Web site that its mission is "to provide homes for arctic and sub-arctic wildlife in a natural setting for the enjoyment and educational enrichment of Alaskan residents and visitors to our state." Maggie the South African elephant is certainly not an arctic or a sub-arctic animal. The board has an ethical responsibility to give her the proper living conditions for an animal with her requirements. Instead of wasting money on an unused and unnatural treadmill, the board could have had her relocated to another zoo with elephants in a much larger and warmer environment.

The board should start following its mission statement and also the models of the Alaska SeaLife Center and the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center and only display Alaska animals in their natural habitats. In the meantime, Maggie is the one who loses.

---- Jillian Simpson
Anchorage

Maggie should be roaming with herd

Elephants, like people, want to interact with their kind, play together and nurture friendships. Elephants, like people, do not want confinement in small quarters and the subsequent loneliness and despair that is the consequence.

As Alaska Zoo's curator, Pat Lampi agreed that a sanctuary would be a better place for Maggie. But as zoo administrator, his stance now is that she is all right living at his zoo. Which is it?

Animal behaviorists studying female elephants in the wild know that they roam and live with their herd in a familial way. Maggie is deprived of both opportunities to roam and socialize at this zoo. Elephants have large and strong feet, but they are no match against the cold concrete of winter. Inevitably, the feet and joints become inflamed, and the onset of pain becomes an enduring hardship for these animals, of which Maggie is one.

As one who has witnessed foot disorders of the elephants at the St. Louis Zoo, I call on Mr. Lampi to abide by his original posture and do the right thing by Maggie now.

---- Mack Freeman, member
St. Louis Animal Rights Team
St. Louis, Mo.

Boycott the zoo to free its captive

The Alaska Zoo's excuses for keeping its death-grip hold on Maggie are based entirely on money and are full of holes. Elephant experts, the zoo's staff and groups from around the country agree she should be moved.

The elephant sanctuaries know how to successfully integrate new elephants into their facilities. Once Maggie is in a suitable environment, she will be happy and open to integration, which is her natural instinct.

Many Alaskans and visitors have observed Maggie's unhappiness, wretched conditions and health problems. The criticism is not coming just from people who have "never visited the zoo nor seen Maggie." Living conditions in Alaska cannot be tailored for Maggie because no one can control the weather. Maggie cannot tolerate the cold, so she is kept in a concrete prison most of the year.

To board member Marnie Brennan, I say, no one is "quickly judging" the zoo. The criticism has been going on for years. The only donations that should be made are to move Maggie, not merely change her floor. The best way we can pressure the zoo to free Maggie is to boycott it. Once she sees her bottom line affected, Alaska Zoo founder Sammye Seawell might take notice and be persuaded to do the right, humane thing.

---- Carol Jensen
Anchorage

\$1.2 million for upgrades wasted

If the zoo really cared, it would have spent a small fraction of the wasted \$1.2 million for upgrades and sent Maggie to Tennessee where she could live her life, instead of having it bored out of her, one step at a time. It will be a cold day in elephant hell -- every day -- as long as Maggie is cooped up in this Alaska prison. With a history of human abuse like this, it's no wonder an elephant never forgets.

---- Tim I. Martin
Corona, Calif.

Pachyderm must be zoo's cash cow

These words of Megan Holland's Jan. 19 article on Maggie the elephant say it all: "expanding and ventilating Maggie's cage."

A huge creature, social by nature, born in the wild and intended by her creator to stay in the wild with her family, is now locked alone in a cage, the prisoner of a few people's cultural backwardness, greed and arrogance.

Why is it that zoo officials don't see Maggie's plight the way the "animal rights" people see it?

Perhaps because they do not have the incentive to put themselves in her shoes -- in her big, sore-from-the-concrete feet -- to imagine how she feels in those barren, tedious, cramped surroundings.

Instead, they walk about freely, go home to family, entertain themselves with their paychecks -- money they have made off Maggie's miserable life in that cage.

If Maggie had no impact on zoo gate receipts, she would be long gone.

---- Susan Clay
Houston, Texas

Animal needs to be with her own

The words above Maggie's picture on the front page of Jan. 19 Daily News ask, "Is the Alaska Zoo elephant happy or not?"

Maggie exhibits symptoms that reveal she is not a happy elephant. Look closely at the middle iron bar in front of Maggie. Toward the bottom you'll see the corners of the bar have been rubbed shiny smooth with her trunk.

When observing Maggie, you'll see she has marked areas in her cell where she visits, repeating over and over certain behaviors.

Captive animals in confined spaces with little room for natural expression typically exhibit stereotypical behaviors. Repetitive movements are a result of boredom. Boredom is a serious form of suffering, according to the University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

Other repetitive behaviors Maggie exhibits are tusk rubbing (rubs them to nubbins on the walls), tusk tapping, and nipple pulling with her

trunk when she is cycling. This is just some of the evidence that tells us Maggie is not a happy, contented elephant. To be an elephant again, she needs her own kind and a warm climate.

----- Penelope Wells
Friends of Maggie
Anchorage

Institution is harming its charge

It's clear that we can no longer ignore evidence that elephants cannot live as Maggie lives without enduring agony and distress. It's clear too that if the zoo continues to fail to respond to these reasoned protests it is simply choosing to ignore science itself in favor of persisting in a course of action that is harmful to Maggie. The continuing rejection of a viable and supported alternative (the sanctuary) brings shame to Alaska. Any suggestion that Maggie's move would not work is pure nonsense. How can it be seriously argued, in the face of scientific evidence, that she would not be better off on natural ground beneath her feet, with room to roam, a herd and companionship?

The zoo relies on Maggie's isolation, the lack of routine press updates on her plight and the support of businesses that have no business continuing to make it possible to keep her here. It is never too late to do the right thing.

----- Helen Sharratt
Eagle River

Follow in footsteps of London Zoo

I read with interest about Maggie -- the elephant. I have been to Anchorage with my kids three times to visit family. I took them to the zoo on one occasion and we thought how wonderful it was that the zoo looked after a lot of injured animals that would not survive in the wild. However, these were mostly animals that were at home in a cold climate. This is not true for the elephant. I believe it is very cruel to keep this poor animal in a cage, in a cold climate. Totally wrong and unjustifiable. London Zoo no longer keeps elephants -- they have been relocated to a game park.

I urge the zoo to please relocate her, and carry on the great work it is doing for the other animals.

I look forward to visiting the zoo and not seeing the elephant when we visit your beautiful city again in August.

----- Peter Phillips
Gravesend, England

Take Detroit's example; free Maggie

Thank you for the article, "What's Best for Maggie?" Elephants should not be in zoos. They should be in the wild where they belong. Zoos do not have the space to adequately provide for the spatial needs of elephants who in the wild can travel up to 30 to 50 miles per day. In addition, being forced to live indoors in cramped concrete enclosures for months on end further exacerbates captivity-induced health problems, including painful degenerative joint disorders, recurrent foot infections and digestive illness. These problems often develop into life-threatening conditions.

Elephants in the wild live 60 to 70 years. Some have been documented to live as long as 89 years. Elephants live to be on average 34 years in captivity.

I hope the Alaska Zoo will send Maggie to the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee or Performing Animals Welfare Society Sanctuary in California as the Detroit Zoo did here in Michigan.

---- William McMullin
Kalamazoo, Mich.