

John Lewis - Re: Urgent - Elephant Carrying Capacity Survey

From: "Mike Keele" [REDACTED]
To: <JLewis@ [REDACTED]>
Date: 10/21/2004 7:48 AM
Subject: Re: Urgent - Elephant Carrying Capacity Survey
CC: "Karen Lewis" [REDACTED]

John,
Please have it returned to me either by email or fax (503.226.0074). Thanks for your help with this.
Mike

>>> "John Lewis" < [REDACTED] > 20 Oct 04 2:47:17 PM >>>
Mike, Harry P went ahead and sent me a copy of the survey. I have delivered it to staff and requested it be completed by tomorrow. Where and how do you want it sent once I have it?
John Lewis

>>> "Mike Keele" < [REDACTED] > 10/19/04 05:11PM >>>
Dear John,

We have been trying desperately to collect carrying capacity information from holders of Asian and African elephants for over 8 weeks. We still have a poor turn out from AZA facilities and, unfortunately, we need this information for a Population Modeling Workshop at the Population Management Center in Chicago beginning next Monday. Our efforts at developing a self-sustaining population of elephants in North America will not be possible without the full cooperation and collaboration of all of our AZA holding facilities.

Won't you please help us by returning our carrying capacity survey? Please contact Karen Lewis at [REDACTED] if you need another survey form or have questions.

Thank you.
Mike

**AZA Elephant TAG/SSP
Space Survey – 2004**

Facility: Los Angeles Zoo

Contact Person: Jeff Briscoe (note e-mail change:jbriscoe@zoo.lacity.org)

Date: _____

	# African	# Asian
1.) Species and numbers currently housed:		
male	_____	1
female	1	1
2.) What is your current maximum holding capacity?		
male	_____	1
female	2	1
3.) What will your holding capacity be in 5 years?		
male	_____	1
female	_____	3+offspring

4.) Are you willing to house only males? **Yes** **No**
 Comments NO

5.) Do you currently have an elephant restraint device (ERD)? **Yes** **No**
 If no, do you plan to install one in the next 1 yr. 2 yr. 3 yr. 4 yr. 5 yr. ?

6.) Do you hold animals that you believe should not be transferred? If so, please list each:

Animal name	SB#	Reason
Tara		She is an older animal with arthritis and is very sensitive to changes in her environment or management.

**AZA Elephant TAG/SSP
Space Survey - 2004**

7.) If you intend to breed your animals, will you be using natural breeding or AI?

Natural or Both AI Both

8.) Do you have space to house all offspring in perpetuity? One generation Yes No

9.) If you hold reproductively viable animals, is there any reason they should not be considered part of the SSP management plan? If so, please list each: NA

Animal name	SB#	Reason

10.) The elephant TAG/SSP believes importation will be necessary to establish a self-sustaining captive population. Is your facility willing to contribute to this effort and if so how?

Potentially yes for Asian animals _____



November 12, 2004

The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa
Councilmember, Fourteenth District



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experience"*

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Los Angeles
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<http://www.lazoo.org>

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John R. Lewis
Zoo Director

Dear Councilmember Villaraigosa:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with Zoo Commission President, Kimberly Marteau Emerson and me about the elephant programs at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. I hope you will find that the give and take from such a conversation will be much more beneficial and informative for you and your concerns about the elephants. However, since our meeting will not occur until mid-December I am responding here to your questions from your last letter, which can be used as a starting point for our discussion.

As to our plans for Ruby's return there are no, and have never been plans to put Ruby, Gita and Tara together. Ruby and Tara will be housed in separate pens because they do not get along with each other while Gita will share time between the two cows and our bull elephant, Billy. This is identical to the way the three cows were managed before Ruby went to the Knoxville Zoo. Restraints are only used for short periods of time to protect Zookeepers when necessary during some procedures. They are not used to generally control elephant movement such as overnight. The secondary elephant facility has shade, heat and constantly fresh drinking water. The elephants there are given daily showers and given baths several times each week. The facility's lay-out provides ample room for the animals and they are involved in a regular exercise program.

During the construction of the new Pachyderm Forest only Gita and Billy will be available for public viewing. Ruby and Tara will not be viewable as the secondary elephant facility does not provide for public viewing. The Pachyderm Forest is funded and should be completed late 2006 or early 2007 along with a new gorilla habitat. Although please know that the exhibit is being completed in sections so some of it will be available to the elephants earlier than the completion date.

As to other Zoo projects, the Zoo's new front entry, which includes the Children's Discovery Center, admissions and entry plaza areas is nearly complete and should open within the next month. The new sea lion exhibit at the front entry plaza is scheduled for a spring 2005 completion. A new monkey exhibit in the middle zoo region will be complete in early 2006 and next week Zoo Staff and Bureau of Engineering Staff will interview design firms for a new reptile and insect building and tropical rainforest



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exhibits. We will not have an actual completion date for these last projects until the designers are hired and the design is complete, but tentatively we have set 2008 as our target for completion. There are definitely a lot of great projects going on at the Zoo.

I hope the above answers your current questions and I look forward to a great discussion in December about elephants and other questions you may have about Zoo operations.

Sincerely,



John R. Lewis
Zoo Director

cc: Nathalie Rayes, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Councilmember Tom LaBonge, Fourth District
Kimberly Marteau, Zoo Commission President



October 12, 2004

Gretchen Wylor, Vice President
[REDACTED]

"Nurturing
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Zoo Director

Dear Ms. Wylor:

Thank you for your earlier letter concerning Ruby, the elephant. Since we have a regularly scheduled Animal Welfare Committee meeting on Oct 21, 2004, which is before Ruby's return to Los Angeles, there is not a need to have another meeting to discuss her arrival. An update on Ruby will be provided at that time.

I am aware of and appreciate your previous contributions to the Zoo's development. I believe that well informed, constructive discourse can lead to program improvement, but it has to be honest discourse even when we disagree. So I find it particularly troubling in discussions about Ruby that you choose to use misinformation and innuendo versus facts to advance your position.

Some examples include: after I met with you personally, exhibit-side to discuss the care of Billy the Asian bull elephant and how he was being provided shade, enrichment and exercise, and weekly visits from Gita you wrote to the Los Angeles Zoo Commission in June of this year expressing your concern about Billy's lack of shade, lack of enrichment and lack of contact with other elephants. In that same letter you used a baseless rumor to infer that our elephant cows were somehow being separated from each other, which was not and is not true.

Now in this most recent letter you ask questions about elephant management and our secondary elephant enclosure for which you already have the answers. I believe it was in April 2004 after one of the Animal Welfare committee meetings, you and other members of the Committee were given a tour of the secondary elephant holding facility with elephants Gita and Tara in residence there. At that time you saw the various substrates, radiant heaters and watering devices, etc. that are available for the elephants. You also saw how the facility was constructed so that the cows could have access to the entire facility or can be restricted to one or more of the four corrals. You even made positive comments about the relaxed state of Gita and Tara.

I am saying these things simply to ask you to be straight with me and quit playing what I perceive to be a game of "gotcha". I think we can be of greater value that way to each other and the animals, even when we disagree. For my part I will be forthright with you as I continue to be concerned about the care and welfare of the elephants and all of the other 1200 animals that reside at the Los Angeles Zoo. Thanks for your continuing interest.

Sincerely,


JOHN R. LEWIS
Zoo Director

JRL/dmt

Cc: Mayor James Hahn
Councilman Tom LaBonge
Renee Woitzer
Zoo Commissioners
Animal Welfare Committee members



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HOLLYWOOD OFFICE

FORMERLY THE ARK TRUST, INC.

GRETCHEN WYLER
Vice President

October 19, 2004

BEVERLY KASKEY
Director

John R. Lewis
Zoo Director
Los Angeles Zoo
5333 Zoo Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90027

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Dear Mr. Lewis,

Your October 12th letter was awaiting me upon my return from a most remarkable and enlightening weekend in Palo Alto - a three-day event sponsored by the Wildlife Conservation Network that brought together the heroes of conservation from around the globe. The conference was comprised of men and women dedicated to protecting snow leopards, Andean cats, okapis, cheetahs and many others, but above all, the wild elephant. I had an opportunity to re-bond with Dr. Iain Douglas-Hamilton and to find a great new friend in the esteemed Cynthia Moss of the Amboseli National Park research project. Most importantly, the weekend exposed me to the complex needs of all elephants.

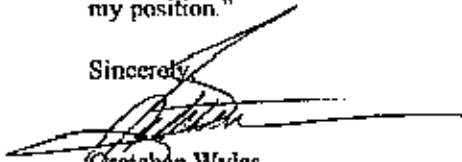
As Vice President of the Hollywood Office of The IISUS (which has eight-million constituents), I am a conduit for people seeking information about Ruby and Billy. Because I have been associated with the L.A. Zoo for many years, people come to me with issues— real or perceived — about the zoo. I regret that your letter implied I have used “misinformation and innuendo versus facts to advance [my] position.” It is the facts that have motivated me throughout the Ruby saga for nearly two years. I doubt you will find one word I have written about Ruby that was not based on fact. It was the L.A. Zoo that clearly misrepresented the reasons for Ruby’s move, stating there is a breeding program in Knoxville (there is none); Ruby’s serving as an auntie (impossible without babies) and that she would be happier with her own kind (she is now 17 months without integration). The zoo P.R. spin assured the public that there was no real bonding between Ruby and Gita and thus the separation would not adversely affect either animal. The zoo continues to refute the bonding even though we have video footage clearly showing the affection between the two elephants. Would you like to see that footage? Misinformation? Whose? You were not there to see it yourself, so we believe you have been misinformed.

As re: your reference to us having had a meeting “exhibit-side to discuss the care of the Asian bull Billy the elephant,” there was no such lone meeting between us. I have hours of video taken over the summer demonstrating that he had absolutely no shade from the afternoon sun (the perimeter trees offered early morning and late afternoon shade only), enrichment and exercise seems to be confined to a game the keepers play which involves throwing out vegetables from different barn doors forcing Billy to walk back and forth. (Here again, the word “exercise” typically means nice long walks!). As re: weekly visits from Gita; yes, I know about those Saturday morning 2-3 hour visits - once a week! When one knows that for his entire adult life Billy had access to the sight, smell and sound of three female elephants; it’s sad that he is now reduced to a weekly visit from Gita. Innuendo? Whose? Obviously, the zoo’s definition of exercise and social contact differs from ours.

In April of 2004, you are correct that our Animal Welfare Committee was given a brief tour of the off-site animal facility. At that time, I recall seeing the water sprinklers (but no pond); I do not recall seeing heaters, but if I had, I would wonder how that could protect them from winter winds through the open sides. No, I did not see, as you implied, how the facility can “be restricted to one or more of the four corrals.” Why would I? At the time, I believed it was merely for Gita and Tara, who did indeed seem relaxed. I had no great problem with what I saw, but I thought it would be very short term. And now, with Ruby returning and the complete Pachyderm Forest on hold, it dismays me greatly that this off-site exhibit may be their home for three or more years. It is not adequate. Fact? Let’s ask the elephant experts.

You asked me to be straight with you and quit playing a game of "gotcha." As a member of the Animal Welfare Committee, I requested many meetings over the past months, seeking information about Ruby's homcoming and your plans for housing the three elephants, and I have been repeatedly rebuffed. I have no time for games, and am insulted by the implication that I play them. Please know that the matter of the L.A. Zoo elephants will not end with Ruby's return. There are many of us who will continue to be genuinely concerned about the isolation of Billy and the sub-standard living conditions we believe will be afforded Ruby, Gita and Tara. Being a member of your Committee and having exchanged thoughts with you, might I ask that in the future you pick up a phone or drop me a note if you find me "choosing to use misinformation and innuendo versus facts to advance my position."

Sincerely,



Gretchen Wyler,
Vice President HSUS Hollywood Office

CC: Mayor James Hahn,
Councilman Tom LaBonge,
Renee Weitzer,
Zoo Commissioners
Animal Welfare Committee Members
Shelby Kaplan-Sloan

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

HOLLYWOOD OFFICE

FORMERLY THE ARK TRUST, INC.

GRETCHEN WYLER
Vice President

September 23, 2004

BEVERLY KASKEY
Director

Dear Mr. Lewis,

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By now the annual AZA meeting has ended, and I can only presume that many decisions about zoo elephants have been debated and some sense of resolution has been established. As a member of the L.A. Zoo Animal Welfare Committee, I am writing to you to inquire about your plans for Ruby's return, since I am concerned with her welfare.

I've served on the Committee for nearly eight years, and hope to continue, realizing that as an animal-rights advocate there may be only a few positive changes I might bring about. But no matter how small the role, I have been encouraged by the occasional "win" during my tenure on the Committee. Three come to mind: the first, of course, was my role in the Mahale Mountains exhibit, which is even acknowledged by a little sign across from the exhibit; the second - as regards the snow leopard exhibit - Mr. Mollinedo acknowledged it was my incessant "nagging" about glass-covered exhibit which propelled him to move forward on a new display; the third - the Approved Sites List. When I joined the Committee, there were nearly 150 non-AZA zoos and sites with which the zoo traded, exchanged and sold animals, and it was called the "Approved Breeders' List." The name was changed to "Approved Sites List" in the late '90s, and slowly reduced to today's list, which has perhaps only 40 sites deserving of animal transfers and dealings. I consider all three of these projects worthy of my time and believe they improved both quality of life for the animals and enhanced the L.A. Zoo as an institution.

When I learned about Ruby's move in Nov. '02, I resolved to try to stop the move. As we both know, you were not around at that time, so you did not personally observe their relationship and -although I now know that keepers and others who were there have told you that our description of their friendship has been "overstated" and "overplayed" - it has not been. I visited them often; they were seldom separated, touching and entwining trunks, throwing hay on each other - a joy to behold! I was deeply saddened that this relationship had been completely ignored in the plan suggested by the AZA and SSP. I also found out that there was no breeding program in Knoxville, and that their bull elephant was not breeder-proven, so I became aware that the reason for sending Ruby away to somehow help preserve the species was specious. That's history.

May I know what the plan is for her return? Since this does absolutely have to do with the welfare of Ruby, may I ask you to schedule a meeting of our Animal Welfare Committee ASAP? Perhaps I do you an injustice, but I am not encouraged by the words you have put forth on your "Update on Ruby the Elephant" paper.

RECEIVED


SEP 24 2004

LOS ANGELES ZOO
DIRECTORS OFFICE

You mention the open-air barn and yard, and off-exhibit area, "where Ruby, Gita and Tara could live while a new elephant habitat was under construction." That the facility "exceeds the AZA minimum standards by 73%." That "she will have a covered space and an outdoor yard where she can connect with the other elephants" – meaning Gita and Tara – and the elephant keepers. That you state the zoo "has adequate facilities for her." That is all I know about The Plan. I have spoken to many elephant experts, who say this is NOT a plan, since it does not even attempt to anticipate potential problems between Ruby and Tara. Based on their bad history and the mere fact that the three girls were never housed together in the L.A. Zoo exhibit, why would anyone believe that it's going to be okay now? We must all consider the worst-case-scenario, which could become a P.R. disaster. I attach a paper, which details those.

I look forward to your response as soon as possible since this is a matter of some urgency.

Regards



Gretchen Wyler
Vice-President

GW/jt

CC: ✓ Mayor James Hahn
✓ Councilman Tom LaBonge
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RUBY'S HOMECOMING

How will Ruby be introduced? Does the plan include having a trained elephant behaviorist there? She may be coming "home," but she will be coming to a holding area new to her. Having become "dominant" in Knoxville, she may react differently to Gita. What introduction procedures will be established to ensure a successful re-introduction to Gita, and by whom?

Will this behaviorist be made aware of the "bad blood" (a matter of historical record) between Tara and Ruby? What introduction procedures will be utilized to avoid a serious altercation?

What are the exact dimensions of the off-site exhibit which is given to the three female elephants? According to your statement, it is 73% larger than the space required to meet AZA standards for elephants. The AZA requirement is simply 1,800 square feet for the first elephant and 900 square feet for each additional elephant. 73% increase of this size is 6,228 square feet. That is really small for these three elephants to be housed until the completion of the Pachyderm Forest. As of this date, the project is on hold, and the completion of it could be as many as three years from now.

Will the temporary area be sectioned off to separate the cows from each other? If issues arise such as medical or behavioral problems that necessitate separating these three, the space will be too small for each elephant. This would be a serious consideration if Ruby has become as aggressive as has been stated by Knoxville.

Since this is such a small area, there is concern that the elephants will be tethered in chains or ropes for extended periods of time. If the animals are left together at night, there would be a risk of injury in such a small area. They could not get away from each other if they chose to do so. It would seem likely that tethers must be used, which would be inhumane given that tethers have not been used on Tara, Gita and Ruby since the mid-'90s. This would be particularly harmful to Tara given her arthritis.

The lack of a pool in this area is troubling, since the elephants have enjoyed it so much in the past. What will be the available water source for the elephants to allow them to bathe or cool themselves?

Will the elephants have drinking water accessible to them at all times in this holding area? Water must be continually available – what is the plan for that? It would be unfair to deny water in such an arid, hot climate as here in Los Angeles.

What is the substrate? Obviously, since most elephant problems begin with their feet and legs, natural floor surfaces must be part of the enclosure. Assuming this is the case, the surface must be rototilled to keep it soft, as in a small, heavily trafficked area such as this the surface will become hardened, in fact, comparable to concrete. Here again, Tara's condition would be worsened.

How will the girls be kept warm during the cold spells? In their former barn, the floor was heated, as well as the forced air heat, for protection and comfort. L.A. temperatures are not life-threatening for elephants, but it certainly can get uncomfortably cold.

The off-site exhibit has a sheltered area, but it makes no mention of an enclosed area for those rare, bitterly chilling and windy nights that can occur in Griffith Park. These three elephants are older and arthritic enough without cold weather being forced on them.

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CORRECTION TO THIS ARTICLE

An earlier version of this article incorrectly described an animal preserve in California that houses one of the nation's two major elephant sanctuaries. The 100-acre elephant range is part of a 7,000-acre preserve for formerly captive animals. The error has been corrected.

Seeking a Home That Fits Elephants' Case Highlights Limits of Zoos

By Marc Kaufman
Washington Post Staff Writer
Tuesday, September 21, 2004; Page A01

ROYAL OAK, Mich. — Step up, step down. Walk over the logs going forward, go over again going backwards.

Wanda the elephant is doing physical therapy to ease her arthritis and joint pain, a serious condition for a 9,300-pound animal and one common among older elephants that spend long periods on concrete instead of the softer soil of the wild.

Nearby, her longtime companion Winky is getting her feet cleaned and scrubbed in an effort to stave off infections, which are also common among zoo elephants.

By any current standards, their nearly one-acre enclosure at the Detroit Zoological Institute is an exemplary elephant display, filled with trees and hanging balls and baskets of hay to play with. But Wanda and Winky are nonetheless at the center of an unprecedented dispute within the zoo world, touched off by the director's conclusion in May that it is inhumane to house two Asian elephants in a northern zoo. The long winter keeps them cooped up inside for months, he said, and makes them prone to serious physical and emotional ailments.

That decision has led to months of conflict between the Detroit zoo and the national zoo accrediting organization: The zoo wants to send Winky and Wanda to a warm-weather elephant sanctuary, but the zoo organization wants them to go to another northern zoo. The dispute could have major implications for the way zoos operate and provide for their elephants, and for the future of elephants in many other zoos. Already, the controversy is being seen as a defining moment in the broadening national debate over animal welfare and animal rights.

"We struggled for a long time to come up with a plan for our elephants that met their needs in a humane way, but we ultimately concluded it was impossible here in Detroit," said zoo Director Ron Kagan, a longtime advocate of improving the welfare of zoo animals.

"We in the zoo world present ourselves to the public as advocates for our animals, and yet it became clear that elephants in northern zoos don't get adequate time outside because of the cold, and they suffer physically and emotionally as a result," he said, adding that the zoo now pays \$1,000 a month for Wanda's pain medications. "We realized we have to walk the talk, and that means sending these two wonderful animals to a place better suited to them."

After coming to the difficult decision to part with the elephants, Kagan thought he had a perfect solution. Winky, 51, and Wanda, 46, would be sent to one of two warm-weather U.S. elephant sanctuaries -- in Southern California and in Tennessee -- where they could roam relatively freely year-round and spend what Kagan called a "great retirement for two animals that have excited people for 50 years."

But Kagan's announcement proved premature. Earlier this month, the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, which accredits most major U.S. zoos and controls the movement of endangered zoo animals such as Asian elephants, recommended that the animals be sent instead to the zoo in Columbus, Ohio.

Rejecting Kagan's argument that elephants cannot be housed humanely in northern zoos, AZA officials concluded that the two should be integrated into Columbus's "herd" of five elephants -- where they could serve as elderly "aunts" to a newborn male. Mike Keele of the Oregon Zoo, head of the association's species survival program for Asian elephants, said sending the animals to either of the two sanctuaries would be inappropriate because neither is accredited by the organization. He also said that some Asian elephants appear to like being outside in the snow.

"Every member of the herd in North America is important to the survival of the herd," Keele said. "We believe that Winky and Wanda still have an important role to play at the Columbus zoo in terms of the social situation there, and so they should remain in the managed herd." Unless the animals are declared "surplus," he said, they cannot be sent to a sanctuary, and any zoo that does so risks sanction from the AZA.

Dismayed, the Detroit zoo this week made the first formal appeal ever of an AZA elephant placement decision. It is now marshaling supporters to try to convince the association that, when it comes to elephant care, it's time for change.

What zoo officials call the North American herd of Asian elephants numbers about 280 animals, with about 150 in AZA facilities and others in circuses and smaller zoos. It is, by all accounts, a group that cannot sustain itself without the highly controversial addition of animals from the wild because it has a disproportionate number of older females.

What's more, breeding in zoos has proven difficult, life expectancy is shorter than in the wild, and many captive elephants sway their heads back and forth in a stress reaction when in small spaces for long periods of time. In 2000, an African elephant named Nancy at the National Zoo in Washington was found to have tuberculosis after it was euthanized.

And then there are the foot and joint problems, which are widespread. In the wild, elephants walk as much as 30 miles a day, and movement keeps their feet and joints healthy. In many zoos -- and certainly most circuses -- elephants spend long hours standing still on concrete. As zoo leaders explain, however, the alternatives may not be better: Many elephants are killed in the wild by poachers, and their habitat is quickly vanishing.

The nation's two major elephant sanctuaries -- a 100-acre elephant range in California that is part of a 2,300-acre preserve for formerly captive animals, and a 2,700-acre facility in Tennessee -- have agreed to take Wanda and Winky. Both offer large open spaces and mild climates, and the California facility even has a massive hot tub for the elephants. However, the sanctuaries, which are nonprofit organizations that take in abused and "surplus" animals, have not been embraced by the zoo organization, in part because the sanctuary leaders have been quite critical of AZA guidelines and practices.

In the sanctuaries, the animals are largely allowed to do as they choose. In addition, keepers and the animals never come into direct contact, and keepers use only positive enforcement methods to encourage

the animals to behave. In many zoos, elephant keepers still have direct access to the animals inside their enclosures, a practice that requires some level of dominance and physical intimidation to train the animals and protect the keepers.

One of Kagan's objections to moving Winky and Wanda to the Columbus zoo is that the facility -- acknowledged to be one of the nation's best for elephants -- nonetheless uses dominance techniques.

"We just don't see how threatening or punishing an elephant can be ever okay," Kagan said.

Gerald Borin, executive director of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, acknowledged that his keepers do enter the enclosure of one female elephant regularly. He said the keepers carry an ankus -- a short metal staff with a sharp, curved end -- for protection, but almost always work with the elephants using positive reinforcement. The hands-on approach inside the enclosure, he said, allowed keepers to help the elephant with the recent successful birth of a baby male.

Borin said his zoo asked for Wanda and Winky in order to create a larger and more complex herd for the highly social elephants. He said a large new indoor elephant enclosure allows the animals to move about even during the winter months. But he said he was not opposed to sending some elephants to sanctuaries "if that would clearly be best for them."

Detroit's action follows the San Francisco Zoo's decision earlier this year to send its two elephants to a sanctuary. That decision, also contested by the AZA, was prompted by accusations of inadequate facilities and care, not ethical considerations, but the coincidence means the "AZA is finding itself not just trying to contain a brushfire, but seeing the blaze break out all around the country," said Wayne Pacelle, president of the Humane Society of the United States. The society strongly supports the Detroit zoo's position.

In resisting calls to send Wanda and Winky to a sanctuary, the AZA is also trying to stave off difficult questions being raised about keeping any elephants in captivity -- questions that could easily mushroom into a broader debate about rhinos or lions or other big mammals.

Michael Hutchins, the association's conservation and science director, pointedly made the connection by bringing up the Detroit zoo's large new polar bear display and noting that in the wild, the bears travel extensively and never experience the summertime temperatures that occur in Detroit. "Using their logic," he said, "then polar bears really shouldn't be in Detroit, either."

Kagan says there is no comparison between his zoo's polar bear display -- which features one bear rescued from a Mexico circus and large pools of cold salt water with fish -- and the elephants' situation.

"By many indices, elephants just don't do very well in captivity," he said. "They have more difficulty adapting than most other animals, don't breed as well, and show signs of stress. This is a challenge that zoos need to talk about, and that the public needs to learn about, too."

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From: John Lewis
To: Bill Dyer
Date: 8/17/04 6:31PM
Subject: Re: Elephants

Bill,

Thanks for your note. Let me share some information about Billy's care which will hopefully allay some of your concerns. With the exception of the time keepers are cleaning his stall, Billy has continual access to his barn for shade. He chooses when to go in and out and he uses it frequently. Also, in the morning and late afternoon the exhibit has quite a bit of shade from the surrounding trees. Twice a day keepers exercise Billy and provide him with enrichment and training so that he is not alone or left without change in his environment. And then, although male elephants frequently live alone in the wild, our cow elephant Gita is walked to Billy's barn on Saturdays for a 2.5 to 3.5 hour visit. If there are enough staff during the week she sometimes makes more than just the Saturday visit.

So, in this case maybe you and I don't see the same because you saw a point in time and I deal with 24/7 all year long. We are concerned about his care, just like you, and we work to assure his needs are met.

John Lewis

>>> Bill Dyer [REDACTED] 08/17/04 02:05PM >>>

Director Lewis: I wanted to thank you for taking the meeting last week with Chris and myself. After our meeting Chris and I went to visit Billy. He has no shade at all and while the zoo is filled with vegetation, he has not a blade of grass. The packed earth might as well be cement. The exhibit where he spends his days is completely barren. He spends his days - and years - alone with no companions - in an uninteresting environment. Do you and I see the same things? The conditions that Billy endures are terrible. Can't the zoo afford some kind of shade for him, at least? I believe that zoo people do not feel that animals have emotions or feelings, at least to the degree that they are capable of suffering. Otherwise Billy would not be existing as he is. This is what separate us. If zoos would truly provide for these large mammals in a responsible way that met their historic needs there would be no conflict. Bill Dyer.



July 30, 2004

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Zoo Director

The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa
Councilmember, Fourteenth District

[REDACTED]
Dear Councilmember Villaraigosa:

Thank you for your letter regarding elephant management at the Los Angeles Zoo & Botanical Gardens. I appreciate the opportunity to address your concerns.

The Zoo has sufficient facilities to house all of our elephants, including "Ruby", during construction of the Pachyderm Forest. Before construction was started, and even before it was decided to send "Ruby" to Knoxville, work began on an off-exhibit elephant facility at the Los Angeles Zoo. The resulting facility, which is now complete, exceeds the American Zoo and Aquarium Association's minimum standards for three elephant cows by 70%. It is not cramped and provides ample room to house the three cows during construction of Phase I of the Pachyderm Forest. Zoo Staff have been working with our elephant cows in this facility for nearly one year now and are constantly assessing its functionality and appropriateness for the cows. We have even added a restraint chute so that all the elephants, including "Tara", can be examined and medically managed if necessary. It should be noted here that only Phase I of the Pachyderm Forest projects included elephant facilities. Phase II is for other species, such as rhinoceros and birds, to compliment the elephants.

"Billy", our Asian bull elephant, is housed at the elephant exhibit where he has always been kept. He is a healthy young male with no outstanding medical issues. Construction of the Pachyderm Forest is planned and sequenced so that he can be managed in our existing barn and moved through the outdoor yards as they are completed. Asian elephant bulls typically live solitary lives. However, each Saturday before the Zoo opens, "Gita", a female Asian elephant, is walked to "Billy's" barn for a 2.5-3.5 hour visit. They are not in the same stall, but in the same area where they can communicate by sight, sound and smell. Some weeks, as staff allows, "Gita" makes more than one visit per week with "Billy". In addition, Billy is exercised 2-3 times daily by the elephant staff, so he is not isolated from care givers or other elephants.



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Councilmember Antonio Villaraigosa
July 30, 2004
Page Two

Much work has already been done on Phase I of the Pachyderm Forest including partial demolition of the former cow yards and re-routing of utility lines. At the July 29, 2004 Zoo Bond Oversight Committee meeting, BOE was directed to proceed with hiring contractors for final demolition and landscape removals to prepare for the new construction to come. Final schedules for completion are yet to come, but I will report them to you as soon as they are available.

I and the LA Zoo staff are keenly aware of the public's interest in the Zoo's elephant herd. I assure you that we are also just as keenly committed to the welfare of our elephants and all of the other 1,200 animals residing here.

Thanks again for your interest. I look forward to working with you on elephants or any other Zoo related issue about which you may have questions or concerns. I would be happy to personally tour you or your staff to illustrate any of the items and facilities I have described above.

Sincerely,



JOHN R. LEWIS
Zoo Director

JRL/dmt

cc: Nathalie Rayes, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor
Councilmember Tom LaBonge, Fourth District
Kimberly Matteau, Zoo Commission President



ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA
COUNCILMEMBER OF THE FOURTEENTH DISTRICT

July 21, 2004

John R. Lewis
General Manager
Los Angeles Zoo
5333 Zoo Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90027

Dear Mr. Lewis:

As one who was concerned about the Los Angeles Zoo's 2003 decision to transfer Ruby the elephant to Memphis, I am encouraged to hear of the decision to bring her back to Los Angeles.


However, Ruby's impending return raises some questions about the status of the Zoo's elephant herd and the facilities provided for them.

I am aware that Gita, Tara and Billy currently reside in cramped quarters while awaiting construction of phase one of the Pachyderm Forest. To the untrained eye, it appears that no construction activity currently is underway. What is the status of the phase one project at this time? Is there sufficient Proposition A funding to complete the project on time and on budget? How does the Zoo propose to finance phase two? And, finally, is there a contingency plan if completion of the Pachyderm Forest becomes infeasible?

Because the current elephant facility is small and Billy is being quartered in isolation from Tara and Gita, what is the plan for housing Ruby upon her return? Will she be reunited with her long-time friend Gita? And what is being done to address Tara and Billy's respective health problems?

I know you are aware that the Zoo's elephant herd is the subject of considerable public and media scrutiny. I believe the welfare of these majestic animals is one of the most visible measures of how well the Zoo is doing its job. I look forward to receiving a substantive response from you as soon as possible.

Very Truly Yours,


ANTONIO R. VILLARAIGOSA
Councilmember, 14th District
ARV/jb

Cc: Hon. Tom La Bonge
Kimberly J. Marteau, President, Board of Zoo Commissioners



From: John Lewis
To: Renee Weitzer
Date: 7/29/04 4:27PM
Subject: Ruby

Renee,

Following is some information that should help you address questions from Gretchen Wyler about Ruby the elephant.

As you know from this morning's ZBOC meeting a plan is in place to move the Middle Zoo exhibits forward again. Much work has already been done however, including partial demolition of exhibits (including the elephant yards), re-routing of the utility lines and changes to pedestrian walkways to address ADA accessibility. The yards used previously for the elephant cows can not be used in their current state nor can they easily be restored for that purpose. Contracts should be awarded soon to complete the landscape removal and structure demolition of the existing facilities in preparation for new construction.

There is a lot of work before us now as we prepare for Ruby's return. The Zoo will be focusing on the safe return of Ruby; her safe reintroduction to Gita; her safe sensory reintroduction to Tara; and her safe reintroduction to the Los Angeles Zoo staff and facilities. Public homecomings should not be considered until all of that is accomplished. Additionally, the holding facility was designed for elephant management and staff safety. It is a good, functional elephant facility but it was not designed for public viewing. Therefore, we will have to very carefully consider whether there can be any general public access to Ruby until the Pachyderm Forest is completed. I would be happy to show you the facility, if you haven't already seen it. Gretchen has seen it with Gita and Tara residing there.

I hope this helps. As always, let me know if you have additional questions or if I can help in any way.

John Lewis



DATE: July 1, 2004
TO: Board of Zoo Commissioners
FROM: John R. Lewis, Zoo Director
SUBJECT: WYLER COMMUNICATION

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John R. Lewis
Zoo Director

Recently you received a communication from Ms. Gretchen Wyler, V.P. HSUS Hollywood Office, regarding elephants at other American Zoo & Aquarium Association (AZA) member zoos and elephant management at the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. In that communication, her allegations albeit serious are full of misinformation and innuendo. Therefore, I thought it important to share with you the facts about the issues and our program so that you are accurately informed.

The Detroit Zoo has decided to eliminate elephants from their collection for a variety of reasons that are important and relevant to the Detroit Zoo. They are well within their right to do that. Detroit Zoo Director, Ron Kagan and the Detroit Zoo are working with the AZA's Elephant Species Survival Plan (SSP) to find a new home or homes for the two elephants currently living at the Detroit Zoo. One of the elephants actually belongs to another AZA member zoo, so they are involved as well. It has not been decided yet whether they will go to a sanctuary or another AZA member zoo.

The San Francisco Zoo situation is very different. The zoo there is being forced by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, who is not listed as the zoo's governing authority, to eliminate their elephant exhibit and place their elephants in a sanctuary. The issue in San Francisco is not about whether they can eliminate their elephant program but the process for placing animals that are part of the larger AZA SSP population. Member zoos agree to abide by SSP decisions as part of their AZA Accreditation to help insure the integrity of our population programs. Ignoring that pledge affects every AZA member institution holding that particular species not just the single institution in question. That is the issue in San Francisco. AZA's response is not shocking but to be fully expected. I have attached a press release from the AZA that explains the Association's concerns. Finally, the AZA has no authority over its member institutions except that which is coded to it by those member institutions.

The comments from Ms. Wyler about our male elephant are particularly troubling because they are inaccurate and misrepresented and because she and I have talked about these very issues several times during which she was given the same information I am about to share with you. She either doesn't understand what she is told or refuses to accept it as reliable/accurate information.

Our male elephant, Billy is housed alone at the elephant exhibit and will be during the renovations of that exhibit. Males are more solitary by nature than females. A fact that is acknowledged by one of Ms. Wyler's trusted experts, Carol Buckley, in a recent article in the Detroit News where she said, "They [elephants] are very social animals who do not generally like to live alone, unless they are males..." (The rest of the quote is about diet.)

However, every Saturday morning, before the zoo opens, our female, Gina is walked to the elephant exhibit to spend 2.5 to 3.5 hours in the barn with Billy. They are not in the same stall, but the same area where they can communicate by sight, sound and smell. Some weeks, as staff allows, Gina makes more than one visit to Billy before the zoo opens to the public. This has been going on consistently since the females were moved for the construction. In addition, Billy is exercised by staff 2-3 times each day, which includes enrichment, and has at least one training session each day, so he is not alone without care givers or other elephants.



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July 1, 2004

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Billy has access to shade. With the exception of the time when elephant keepers are cleaning his stall the barn door is open so that he has free access to the barn for shade or other retreat when he chooses. Elephants do not have to be shaded, but must have access to shade. He does.

Billy does bob his head at times but it is the opinion of our elephant staff that this is a comfort behavior for him. Dr. Cox, our animal behaviorist, has been monitoring him and our other elephants for years. This has continued through Ruby's departure and the relocation of the females for the construction. During the last four years the male's head bobbing behavior has actually declined in frequency, not become worse as Ms. Wyler implies.

The rumors about our female elephants Gita and Tara being separated are just that, rumor. They are not separated except when Gita is walked or when keepers are working directly with Gita as Tara can only be worked in protected contact. To use that rumor to amplify Ms. Wyler's concerns about Ruby, our elephant in Knoxville, is disingenuous. Her assertions that AZA Elephant Standards #2.2.2 and 2.2.3 are being violated are totally off the mark as those standards were designed to make sure elephants being introduced can be protected from each other if necessary. Prior to those standards some institutions had no way to separate animals if there were disagreements. As it relates to Standard #2.2.4 Ruby does interact with the other elephants at Knoxville, particularly with the male, and she has access to the outdoor yards on a regular basis for exercise.

Such rumor mongering on Ms. Wyler's part, I believe now, is indicative of her style to affect issues with untruths, rumors and misinformation versus facts. This is unfortunate because I believe it is beneficial to have constructive, contrary voices in the community observing public institutions. But those voices have to be trustworthy and credible.

I hope the above information gives you a better perspective on these issues and allegations. The elephant management at the Los Angeles Zoo is designed to serve the welfare of the animals and safety of the staff and visiting public. The program is based on the intrinsic needs of the elephants.

JRL/dmt

Attachment

Cc: Nathalie Rayes
Denise Verret
Lora LaMarca
Michael Dee
Jennie McNary

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HOLLYWOOD OFFICE
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DATE: JUNE 11, 2004

TO: MEMBERS OF THE L.A. ZOO BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

FROM: GRETCHEN WYLER, V.P. HSUS HOLLYWOOD OFFICE

I had hoped to ask for an Agenda item and present this paper in person, but my schedule did not permit.

Perhaps each one of you is aware of the bold move announced by Roger Kagan, Director of the Detroit Zoo, via the Associated Press over two weeks ago. After much deliberation with his Board and consideration of his actions, he decided that the Detroit Zoo will become the nation's first major animal facility to release its elephants to a sanctuary solely on ethical grounds. Detroit's one-acre enclosure is about 16 times larger than what the AZA standards require but, as Kagan said, "people's traditional expectation of zoos is that they see lions and tigers and elephants, but it's also their expectation that an animal has a good life. Elephants are the only animals at the zoo for which there is a great disparity between what they need and what we can provide."

In a similar move the San Francisco Zoo, following the recent deaths of two of its elephants (including wonderful Calle who, a few years ago, was loaned to the S.F. Zoo when Manuel Mollinedo hastily decided she was "dangerous" after she injured a keeper) is in negotiations with the Board of Supervisors regarding closing its exhibit and sending its two remaining elephants to the PAWS Sanctuary, which provides over 100 acres for the elephants to roam free, a 20,000 square foot barn, and even boasts a Jacuzzi for arthritic elephants! As you know, Mollinedo is the new Director of that zoo, and he is being put in a very difficult position, since the city authorities contend that they have the authority over a city-funded facility. Sydney Butler, AZA Executive Director, is quoted as saying, "the conflict could result in the loss of accreditation for the zoo, and potentially [result in] an ethics charge."

The response from the AZA has been shocking. I enclose paperwork and I hope you will want to review it. It is clear to anyone that the AZA is not interested in the welfare of these two individual animals, but is responding with arrogance and outrage that its position of authority is being questioned. Over the years, the AZA has prided itself that zoos it has accredited are considered superior to other zoos. thanks to the AZA's high standards.

Which brings me to the real reason for this paper – my very real concerns for the welfare of Billy. I would like to believe that none of you has visited Billy on a hot summer afternoon. I go often, and on my last visit, I vowed to put my anger in writing to the Commissioners. I (now) know that the Board has absolutely no say in the disposition or acquisition of animals, but surely the Board must have a say in the welfare of its captive animals.

Billy is now completely alone, without sensory connection to the females with whom he has had contact with throughout his life. VIOLATION OF AZA STANDARD #2.2.5: "Adult males six years and above may be housed alone, but not in complete isolation. Opportunities for tactile, olfactory, vision and/or auditory interaction with other elephants must be provided." There is no shaded area in his enclosure. VIOLATION OF AZA STANDARD #1.1.2: "While outdoors, all elephants must have access to shade during daylight hours in temperatures above 80 degrees when they are exposed to direct sunlight." For 37 minutes, I clocked Billy who, backed up to the fence, and standing in his own feces, bobbed his head up and down unceasingly. It was devastating to see. There was no signage that might have said, *My name is Billy and I'm a nineteen-year-old Asian bull elephant who arrived here when I was four-years-old.* With such signage, the public would at least know his sex and species.

There was no browse in the enclosure. No behavioral enrichment except a lone tire hung high on a cable. The reaction of the visitors was awful. Everyone was asking, "Is she trying to throw up?" or "What's wrong with him?" Billy appeared to have a swollen abdomen on his left side. People asked, "Is she pregnant?" No one liked what they saw. Most people remarked about his behavior and seemed uncomfortable with it. Hardly educational, and definitely no fun to see. Most people left quickly.

May I request that the members of the Commission go and see for themselves? With the recent questions being raised about elephants being held captive, is one to think that Billy's miserable situation is a good advertisement for elephants at the L.A. Zoo? I think not. Based on the support the public has demonstrated for the Detroit and San Francisco Zoos' elephants being sent to sanctuaries, it would seem that they have become highly sensitive to the needs of these animals. The public is watching.

There is also a rumor that Gita and Tara have had to be separated with a barrier between them. It's just a rumor, but how truly worrisome to realize that all four of the L.A. Zoo elephants may now be suffering emotionally. After one year, Ruby is still not integrated. OTHER VIOLATIONS OF AZA STANDARDS: #2.2.2: "Institutions must have the ability to manage social compatibility as well as dominance and aggression among an elephant group." #2.2.3: "Institutions must have the ability to manage introductions and separations of a new female to a herd." #2.2.4: "Institutions must provide an opportunity for each elephant to exercise and interact socially with other elephants." So much for standards!

As a member of the Animal Welfare Committee, I believe it is my duty to bring this matter to the attention of a Board that could alleviate the suffering of one of its animals. I hope the Board feels that it is its duty.

From: Cathleen Cox [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Date: 3/2/2004 1:39 PM
Subject: Fwd: Re: Billy the elephant (mail rec'd at zoo)

X-Mailer: Novell GroupWise Internet Agent 6.0.4 Beta
Date: Sat, 28 Feb 2004 14:13:18 -0800
From: "Cathleen Cox" [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>
Sender: Postmaster@cwgwia.lacity.org
Reply-To: [REDACTED]
To: <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Fwd: Re: Billy the elephant (mail rec'd at zoo)

Date: Sat, 28 Feb 2004 14:13:18 -0800
From: "Cynthia Stringfield" [REDACTED]
To: "Mitch Finnegan" [REDACTED]
Cc: "Cathleen Cox" [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Billy the elephant
Mime-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: multipart/alternative; boundary="=_18391460.BE8FF557"

Hi Mitch,

I am cc'ing our Curator of Research about the gerenuk serum. You need to fill out a form that we review at our Animal Management meeting, Cathy, can you send it to Mitch (head vet at Portland, re: some lab analyses on gerenuk banked serum). Bob Barnes, our registrar is the gerenuk studbook holder so that would involve him in the process too which would be great.

Oh, that "when would be good question"! I'm doing the March schedule today so ask me again next week! What's the egg update there? Have the birds thawed out yet?! :)

Cynthia

>>> "Mitch Finnegan" [REDACTED] 02/26/04 04:26PM >>>
I may actually be able to plan another trip down there. When would be a good time?

By the way - would you mind if I pilfered some banked gerenuk serum while I was there?

- Mitch

>>> "Cynthia Stringfield" [REDACTED] 02/24/04 11:22AM >>>
Jennie McNary [REDACTED] (323) 644-4207 Good luck!

I'm sorry I haven't written back about the condors yet. I too remembered later we were supposed to talk chicks and didn't but I thought, oh, we can have you come visit again next year! How is it going? Can you come visit again? We should dedicate some real time to it since it is complicated

(unless you have done egg x-rays, interventions, etc. before which I had not, it was all kind of cutting edge when we started I think. We did a lab at zoovets a few years back on it so I do have all the CE stuff but you should look at x-rays, have your incubation people talk to ours, etc.). It is VERY rewarding though! What do you think? Hope things are going well there, Cynthia

>>> "Mitch Finnegan" [REDACTED] 02/20/04 06:46PM >>>

Hey Cynthia - I hope all is well with you . Our curator is coming around to the idea of borrowing Billy while you guys are renovating the elephant exhibit. Do you know who he should talk to at your place see if there is a possibility of doing this?

Thanks - Mitch

Cathleen R. Cox, Ph.D.
Los Angeles Zoo
5333 Zoo Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90027-1451

(323) 644-4204 phone
(323) 662-9786 FAX

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]