



ELEPHANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Questions and Answers – Nov. 19, 2014

DECISION

1. Why is Woodland Park Zoo phasing out its on-site elephant program?

We are phasing out our on-site elephant program because we remain committed to putting the welfare of our elephants first. After several months of working to implement the recommendations of the Elephant Task Force, we have found that adding to the herd of our two aging elephants is not realistic in the foreseeable future. It is in the best interest of Bamboo and Chai to live in a social, multi-animal herd in a healthy environment. Having only one or two elephants at the zoo for the long term would work against the broader social welfare of Chai and Bamboo and we are committed to following the recommendations of elephant health and welfare experts.

2. What does the future hold for Chai and Bamboo?

Based on staff and board recommendations, we will move 35-year-old Chai and 47-year-old Bamboo together to a facility accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), where they will continue to receive exemplary care and be successfully integrated in a herd of multiple, socialized elephants. We will begin finding a new home and expect to move them in 2015.

3. Why isn't it possible to acquire Asian elephants from AZA zoos to join our herd?

Studies by North American elephant population management experts predicted a population decline in the Asian elephant population. The decline is attributed to a number of factors including an aging population and limited reproduction. In addition, other zoos are expanding or building new exhibits and, as a result, there are very few individual elephants to acquire. We recognize that the process of expanding existing herds is going to happen slowly, and that it may be a few decades before a sustainable population can be achieved.

4. Is this decision to phase out our on-site elephant program prompted by pressure from activists?

Regardless of the activists' campaign, we would have come to this difficult decision as our herd aged. Studies by North American elephant population management experts predicted a population decline. Also, each year we review the zoo's animal programs, which include physical and behavioral health and care. During this annual review, we make decisions to continue, phase out or introduce new animals. Since the March 2014 zoo Board of Directors decision to move forward with the Elephant Task Force recommendations to acquire more elephants, zoo staff has worked hard to locate additional Asian elephants. However, we realized we could not do what is best for Bamboo and Chai in a reasonable timeframe and so we made the decision to relocate them.

5. What is the Elephant Task Force?

The Elephant Task Force was a panel of local community representatives and internationally-distinguished scientists and animal care professionals commissioned by the zoo's Board of Directors in 2013 to conduct a critical and thorough external review of the zoo's elephant program: <http://www.elephanttaskforce.org>.

MISSION

6. How will the zoo continue its commitment to elephant welfare and conservation without elephants on site?

We will continue our commitment to supporting our elephant conservation partners in Borneo and Tanzania. Further, we will continue to play a key role on the 96 Elephants campaign, named for the number of African elephants currently gunned down each day by poachers. We are committed to this crucial conservation campaign and are partnering with Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on securing ivory ban legislation in Washington state.

The U.S. is one of the largest importers of ivory. An estimated 35,000 African elephants were slaughtered by poachers in 2012 alone due largely to the demand of elephant ivory. Elephants are facing extreme pressure in the wild, particularly from conflicts with humans in Asia. The World Wildlife Fund estimates only 25,600-32,750 Asian elephants remain in their 13 range countries in South Asia and Southeastern Asia. Strong and effective programs on grounds and through digital communications that draw attention to this crisis will be even more critical than ever before.

RELOCATION

7. What is your timeline for moving Bamboo and Chai to another facility? Will it be difficult identifying a zoo that will take them?

Under our high animal care standards, moving any animal to a new home, especially an elephant, requires very thoughtful planning. We will immediately begin carefully evaluating other facilities accredited by AZA to identify a future home for Chai and Bamboo that will match them with a healthy, compatible social grouping of multiple Asian elephants to ensure their ongoing health and well-being. We hope to find a new home and move them in 2015.

It's also important to ensure that Bamboo and Chai move only once to a permanent home.

8. Will Woodland Park Zoo consider sending Chai and Bamboo to a private facility, such as a “sanctuary?”

Because of significant infectious disease at the private facilities in California and Tennessee, Bamboo and Chai would need to be managed separately from other elephants there and could not be fully integrated into a social herd responsibly. Being in a herd is essential for female elephants, and it's especially important for Chai as she is 12 years younger than Bamboo and needs other herd mates to assure her social well-being long into the future. There are a number of AZA-accredited zoo facilities that provide both a multi-animal and healthy herd for Chai's and Bamboo's relocation.

9. What if the zoo gets pressure from the local community to relocate Bamboo and Chai to a private facility?

Bamboo's and Chai's welfare comes first, and to that end, we have developed a set of criteria for their relocation including: a social herd of multiple animals in a healthy environment; a restricted contact management system; experienced elephant and veterinary staff; elephant conservation and education programs; an institution free of significant infectious disease; established history of stable finances and leadership; an institution recommended by the AZA Elephant Species Survival Plan. We also believe that elephants in zoos play an important role by inspiring visitors to take meaningful action to help protect populations in the wild.

FUTURE

10. Will elephants return to Woodland Park Zoo in the future?

We will continue to be involved in elephant conservation in Asia and Africa, but we can't predict what the future holds for bringing elephants back here. We encourage everyone to join our efforts in helping to ensure that elephants and their habitats exist into the future.

ELEPHANT SRI

11. How is Sri doing at St. Louis Zoo?

Giving birth and raising young is one of the most enriching events for female elephants and this is why we sent Sri to Saint Louis Zoo: to enrich her social welfare and help diversify the North American elephant population. Unfortunately, due to complications in the final weeks of her pregnancy, the calf died in the uterus. Since C-section surgery has never been done successfully on an elephant, the best course of action was to allow Sri to pass the calf at her own pace. While she never expelled the calf, Sri survived, thanks to the caliber of Saint Louis Zoo veterinarians, and she is in good health. The fact is this can happen to elephants in the wild as well.

Sri has become an established member of the herd at Saint Louis and a valuable “auntie” to their young elephants. She plays an important role in their breeding program as a member of their elephant matriarchy. She interacts with nine other elephants in the herd, which provides her with excellent social welfare.

Saint Louis Zoo has a reputable elephant management program. Their elephants live in state-of-the-art homes with lots of space and many enriching swimming, exercise and play activities. Sri is in excellent hands and continues to thrive.

INFORMATION

A dedicated email and phone line are set up to collect comments and questions: please refer them to elephants@zoo.org or 206.545.2070. For more information, visit our webpage at www.zoo.org/elephantnews.