

PRESS RELEASE

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Woodland Park Zoo's elephants *Bamboo and Chai* to join an elephant family at Oklahoma City Zoo

SEATTLE—After three months of carefully evaluating potential homes for its two female Asian elephants, 48-year-old Bamboo and 36-year-old Chai, Woodland Park Zoo has selected Oklahoma City Zoo, which has a family of Asian elephants including multi-generations. The zoo anticipates moving the elephants between late March and mid-April.



Oklahoma City Zoo was found to best meet the criteria established by Woodland Park Zoo, which was based on recommendations from animal welfare experts: a social herd of Asian elephants into which Chai and Bamboo may successfully integrate, a state-of-the-art facility, a healthy environment free of active infectious disease, high caliber elephant keeper and veterinary staff, a restricted contact management system, and an established history of stable finances and leadership.

"We are delighted to be able to provide Bamboo and Chai a great new home with a family," said Woodland Park Zoo Board Chair Laurie Stewart. "They will be with a larger, multi-generational herd, which is a primary recommendation of our Elephant Task Force. They will be cared for by some of the best elephant keepers in the country at a state-of-the-art exhibit. We are absolutely thrilled."

Finding a new home for animals, especially elephants, is very complicated and requires a very thoughtful and thorough deliberation.

"Oklahoma City Zoo is the best choice and meets our requirements to provide the best social welfare in a healthy environment for Bamboo and Chai," said Woodland Park Zoo President and CEO Dr. Deborah Jensen. "They will have an opportunity to live and socialize with more elephants and they will continue to receive the same kind of exemplary care they received during their lifetime at Woodland Park Zoo."

About Oklahoma City Zoo

Oklahoma City Zoo opened its new Elephant Habitat in March 2011. The \$13 million, state-of-the-art exhibit spans 9.5 acres, with 3.95 acres available for the elephants, and includes three spacious outdoor yards, a waterfall, and a technologically-advanced barn with amenities including views into the barn from a raised boardwalk. The Elephant Barn is 12,636 square feet with about 2,000 square feet of support space (mechanical rooms, keeper work space, second floor office), and features eight separate stalls with different configuration opportunities plus a community stall with sand substrate. Other barn highlights include a radiant floor heating system, a raised office with 360° view of interior, ambient lighting through windows and skylights and hydraulic-operated animal gates.

To accommodate Asian elephants' love of swimming, all three yards were designed with pools and giant shade structures. Two yards are .5 acres each and the largest of the yards, 2.6 acres, features a 12-foot deep, 214,000-gallon pool plus a waterfall and stream. A pavilion seats 400+ for elephant lovers to observe presentations demonstrating natural elephant behaviors including daily routines such as baths, foot care and training sessions. Visit www.okczoo.com for more information about the exhibit.

"Adding Bamboo and Chai will help round out our family. Their maturity plus experience with a baby will be valuable in broadening the social dynamics of our herd. We look forward to having these new members join our family," said Dwight Lawson, Oklahoma City Zoo Executive Director/CEO.

Oklahoma City Zoo currently has an Asian [elephant family](#) of four females and a male, ranging in ages from 2 months old to 47 years old: female Asha, 20; female Chandra, 18, sister of Asha; female Malee, 4 in April, the daughter of Asha; female Achara, born December 2014, the daughter of Asha and Rex; and sole male Rex, 47, the father of Achara.

Moving Bamboo and Chai

Woodland Park Zoo elephant care staff are currently training the elephants to prepare for the road trip. Bamboo and Chai will travel to Oklahoma City in individual, climate-controlled crates pulled by a tractor-trailer driven by one of the nation's expert animal movers who specializes in moving elephants. "The timing of their departure will depend on the elephants' readiness as well as ideal road conditions," said Martin Ramirez, the zoo's mammal curator. "We know our elephants are very special to thousands in our community, so we encourage everyone to come and see Chai and Bamboo before they head to their new home."

The 2,000-mile journey to Oklahoma City will take approximately 35 to 40 hours including stops every few hours to check on the animals and provide food and water. "We will take every precautionary measure to ensure that Bamboo and Chai arrive safely as we do for all of our animal transfers," explained Ramirez. "Keepers from our expert elephant team and a veterinarian will follow in a car and we will have a contact list of zoo veterinarians and elephant care teams along the route in case of an emergency."

Woodland Park Zoo's staff will spend as much time as necessary with Bamboo and Chai at their new home to help ease their transition to a new facility and help settle them into their new surroundings.

Oklahoma City Zoo has expertise in integrating herds and will follow a methodical plan that socializes Bamboo and Chai with the herd in incremental steps. According to Laura Bottaro, an animal curator at OKC Zoo, introductions will begin in the barn where the elephants can see, smell and touch one another through protective barriers. "During the introduction process, elephants work out a social hierarchy. This process can be immediate or it can take months. We will follow the cues of the animals," said Bottaro.

Factors in the Decision

Woodland Park Zoo Society Board announced in November 2014 it would phase out its on-site elephant program after several months of working to implement the recommendations of the Elephant Task Force to grow its Asian elephant herd and program. "We found that adding to the herd of our two elephants to create a multi-generational herd was not realistic in the foreseeable future and would work against the broader social welfare of Bamboo and Chai," said Jensen.

WPZ's analysis included consideration of many of the other 32 facilities accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums that currently hold Asian elephants in the U.S. and the Performing Animal Welfare Society facility located in California. The Asian herd of two females at this facility has an active tuberculosis (TB) infection. As a consequence of the TB infection at this facility, Woodland Park Zoo's elephants would be required to be socially isolated from, not integrated with, other Asian elephants. These circumstances alone—active TB infection in the herd and social isolation instead of herd integration—are insurmountable disqualifiers regardless of the potential space that may be available at the Performing Animal Welfare Society facility.

Other factors that also weigh against the Performing Animal Welfare Society facility are that it does not have a yard or barns available today for Bamboo and Chai. Although this facility has said they would be willing to raise the money and build a new enclosure for the elephants, given Bamboo's age, the associated delay and uncertainty weigh against this option relative to other facilities with existing space and availability. Even if a new yard were available, should the TB issues in the current Performing Animal Welfare Society herd prove resistant to resolution, Chai and Bamboo would have no herd in which to integrate, and should

Bamboo die before such an integration, Chai would be alone. These are unacceptable risks in planning for the long-term health and welfare of these animals.

“The decision to relocate our elephants is a difficult one for our staff, volunteers, members and zoo family, but it is the right decision. All of us care deeply about these animals and we will continue to have a lifelong investment in their health and welfare,” said Jensen. “We are very grateful to Oklahoma City Zoo for opening their arms to Bamboo and Chai. We are enthusiastic that Chai and Bamboo can join an elephant family in Oklahoma. This is a wonderful conclusion to a complicated chapter in their lives.”

Woodland Park Zoo will remain committed to supporting its elephant conservation projects in [Borneo](#) and [Tanzania](#) and will continue to play a key role in seeking legislation to ban [trafficking in elephant ivory in the state of Washington](#).

Bamboo and Chai are on view daily in the elephant barn or yards during zoo hours. Winter hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. For more information, visit www.zoo.org.

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