



Zoo Edition Archives - Spring 2001

Excerpts from an interview with Pat Maluy, senior keeper, Elephant Forest:

WPZ: What kind of background education and experience do you have for your job?

Pat: I've always been interested in animals. When I was growing up, my father raised game birds, spotting dogs and horses. The rule was, "If you want to ride the horses, you must clean the barn." So I did! I also kept all sorts of reptiles, and raised mice and rats for food for them.

WPZ: What is your education background?

Pat: I studied both biology and zoology, and got a lot of on-the-job training.

WPZ: What was your first paid job?

Pat: I worked in the animal nursery at Lion Country Safari and helped with the educational shows.

WPZ: When did you have your first experience working with elephants?

Pat: At my next job, with Zoo Atlanta. I worked primarily with carnivores, but I was also a relief keeper in the Children's Zoo and with the elephants.

WPZ: What does your job here consist of, normally?

Pat: Primarily, the basic care of our elephant herd and their building, but also training of both elephants and keeper staff, staff scheduling, record keeping and public programs presentations.

WPZ: And now you have five elephants to care for instead of four! How has this baby changed things?

Pat: Very much like any new baby. The routine is totally disrupted, our regular duties have expanded exponentially, and there is a lot more stress for the rest of the elephants. But this is a good thing. Our elephants need this experience to be successful socially. Our elephants have never been around a newborn elephant, so this is very new for them.

This baby is also very important for captive elephant conservation. She is one of only three Asian elephants born in North America during 2000, and one died of a heart defect after only a day. If we are going to continue to keep elephants in captivity, we must be able to increase the population without taking more elephants from the wild.

WPZ: What advice would you give a student interested in working with elephants?

Pat: Get a good education. If they are interested in becoming an elephant keeper, they should study biology, zoology or zoo keeping, and get animal care experience as a volunteer. There is also a training school specifically for elephant keepers in Arkansas, called Riddles Elephant and Wildlife Sanctuary. (www.elephantsanctuary.org)

But you don't have to be a zookeeper to be involved with elephants. The field of elephant research holds a great variety of possibilities. People are just beginning to study bioacoustics, how elephants communicate through sound, both audibly and subsonically. And to understand how many elephants there are in the wild, we need a more accurate census of individuals and how they use their territory.

A whole new field is opening up for people with advanced knowledge of chemistry, and that is the behavioral aspects of smell and scent. When elephants meet, they spend a lot of time smelling each other. What are they learning from these smells? How do they use that knowledge? We now know that elephants exude a fluid between their toenails. This smell differs from individual to individual, and an individual's smell can change because of stress or injury. How do these changes happen? How do they affect the behavior of other elephants? These are all great research questions. There is so much to learn about these interesting and endangered animals - the possibilities are endless!