



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

Elephant Facts

Elephant Health and Welfare Issues at Oregon Zoo

"We don't have humpback whales in captivity, because we can't replicate the wild conditions. I make the argument that we have [elephants in zoos] because visitors expect them. Elephants aren't living the same life as they would in the wild. No zoo animal is. The decision is, can we provide enough to make their lives comfortable, worthwhile, enriched?"

– Tony Vecchio, Oregon Zoo Director, August 22, 2002 (*Willamette Week*)

The Oregon Zoo's medical records provide a clear answer to Mr. Vecchio's question. Under current conditions, the Oregon Zoo has not been able to provide elephants with the comfortable lives they deserve. Rather, zoo conditions have caused elephants to develop painful health problems that erode quality of life and cause prolonged suffering and premature death.



Oregon Zoo Elephant Paddock

LACK OF SPACE

While free-ranging elephants walk ten or more miles a day, and elephant sanctuaries offer hundreds to thousands of acres of natural habitat, Oregon Zoo confines elephants to small paddocks and indoor barn stalls. Even the zoo's recommended expansion plan dedicates only three acres to elephants, an area that will necessarily be divided into at least four yards (three for the males and at least one for the females). This is still woefully inadequate for earth's largest land mammal.

FOOT AND JOINT DISEASE

Foot disease and joint disorders are caused by lack of movement due to small enclosure size and standing on unyielding surfaces like concrete and hard-packed soil. Foot disease is the leading cause of suffering and premature death for elephants in zoos.

At Oregon Zoo:

- Each of the five long-term elephant residents has suffered recurrent foot disorders.
- Three elephants have been euthanized due to severe foot and joint problems in the past decade.
- Chendra, a young elephant from Malaysia, developed foot problems within two months of coming to the Oregon Zoo.

INHUMANE TRAINING AND MANAGEMENT

The Oregon Zoo's training method relies on dominance and physical punishment to control elephants. The majority of Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) zoos have rejected this practice in favor of methods that are far more

humane for elephants and much safer for keepers.

- In 2000, the USDA fined the Oregon Zoo for the abuse of Rose-Tu (then six years old), who had bullhook wounds all over her body (176+ punctures).
- Since 2000, bullhook wounds were found on at least four of six elephants, including on the arthritic and crippled Pet.

BREEDING ISSUES

The Oregon Zoo's breeding program has not been successful, as the following statistics reveal:

- There have been no births at the Oregon Zoo in 13 years.
- More than half of the calves born at the zoo are dead (15 of 26). Two surviving calves are in the circus; the whereabouts of another two are unknown.
- Of the seven females who gave birth, only one is known to be alive (Hanako, Point Defiance Zoo). Elephants in the wild are known to breed into their 50s and even 60s.