



24 November 2008

Dear Los Angeles City Council members,

My name is Joyce Poole, Director of Research and Conservation of the non-profit, ElephantVoices. On 19th November I had the honor to act as an elephant expert for Tony Cardenas' motion to close the elephant exhibit and send Billy to a sanctuary. I had intended to read a statement then, but time constraints in your meeting made that impossible. I am sorry that I will not be able to attend the final meeting that decides Billy's future. I would be grateful if you have a moment to consider the following information.

I have lived in Africa for most of my life. I am a member of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project, the longest study of elephants in the world. For 33 years I have studied the behavior of wild elephants and worked for their conservation and welfare. In the early 1990s I headed Kenya's elephant program and was responsible for the conservation and management of the country's 25,000 elephants. I continue to study African elephants in Kenya and I also run an elephant conservation and research project on Asian elephants in Sri Lanka.

I discovered musth in African elephants as an undergraduate and graduated with high honors from Smith College in 1979, obtained my PhD on elephant behavior from Cambridge University in 1982 and undertook my post doctoral work on elephant communication at Princeton University. I am a world leading expert on male elephant reproductive behavior and musth, and on elephant social behavior and communication. I have written more than 50 scientific papers on elephants and participated in more than 75 elephant television documentaries and interviews.

Elephants are large, long-lived, intelligent and highly social animals. Similar to humans they have a large and complex social network, long memories, and they are self aware and are capable of empathy.

Recently I had the chance to observe the behavior of two elephants from the LA Zoo: Ruby and Billy. On 15th November I watched Ruby at the PAWS sanctuary in San Andreas, and on 17th November I observed Billy at the LA Zoo. The two observations were in stark contrast.

Ruby's behavior was as natural as one could hope to see in captivity: She curiously followed the movements of visitors with her eyes, her trunk, indeed with her entire body as she walked with her companions to observe all that was going on around her. She was fully engaged with her surroundings and took a strong leadership role within her group of new friends. She greeted her companions, exhibited a strong display of bonding behavior with them, and when her group felt threatened by the recorded elephant sounds I played to them, she took the lead to charge 50 metres to defend her group. Her behavior was very natural and she appeared attentive, confident, happy and well integrated.

Contrary to Ruby, Billy was largely oblivious to his surroundings, standing in first one spot and then another bobbing his head. His head bobbing was only halted by a keeper tossing carrots to inspire him to walk back and forth a few meters - merely another form of repetitive behavior. What else is there to do in a 1/4 acre paddock for a very large, intelligent, social animal?

I have made thousands of hours of observation on many thousands of wild elephants, yet I have never seen a wild elephant swaying or head bobbing. Billy's stereotypic head bobbing is a coping mechanism for the loneliness, boredom and frustration that characterises his life in the zoo. His

behavior is symptomatic of the enormous frustration a vigorous, highly social and intelligent creature experiences in confinement.

In the wild elephants are active in mind and body for 20 hours a day. Searching over large areas for food and companions, free-living elephants may meet and interact with over 100 different individuals a day, and sexually active musth males often meet twice that number. Contrary to statements by the zoo, male elephants are not solitary. Until the age of 14 they live in the company of their families and, as adults, they spend two thirds of their time with other elephants. Billy was not designed for solitary confinement.

Throughout my observation of Billy he dribbled urine continuously since his captive state leaves him in a perpetual state of musth, a heightened sexual and aggressive condition, or rut. In the wild a young male of Billy's age would be in musth for a few weeks to a month each year. As testosterone levels rise 100 fold, musth males go through a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde transformation: Their raging hormones impel them to challenge other males and to search over large areas for receptive females. As their heightened activity level progresses, musth males lose weight, are confronted by males in better condition and musth naturally subsides.

In captivity, where elephants are overfed and have no opportunity to engage in activities that would release their enormous energy, males like Billy stay in musth for many months at a time, thus compounding the frustration of confinement.

Captivity is, therefore, particularly gruesome for male elephants, as it is for Billy. He is, in essence, trapped in musth, which makes his level of frustration, despair and on occasion, rage, even more intolerable.

The planned exhibit at your zoo will allow some 3.8 acres of access for elephants. Billy's portion will amount to double the space he has now. But doubling, tripling or quadrupling Billy's enclosure will make little difference to his life. Billy's plight is not only about space, but about what is possible within a given space. Billy needs a chance to search for his own food, to roam on soft surfaces for hours, to interact with a range of companions, to take his own choices – and that is only possible in a space much larger than a city zoo can offer. He needs natural stimuli to keep fit a healthy mind and body, something not possible in either the current nor the proposed LA Zoo exhibits.

Billy will continue to bob his head until his life has fundamentally changed. Given acceptable space and stimuli Billy will begin to engage with his surroundings just as Ruby has done. With time, his discovery of things-to-do will replace head bobbing. The time has come for Billy to experience a life on his own terms, rather than on ours.

Billy has been so much in focus that little thought has been given to the females. Where will they come from? Many female Asian elephants in US zoos are no longer cycling. Will the few that are be made available to live permanently at the LA Zoo? If not, where will they come from? A proposal to import Asian elephants, an endangered species, from range states would be detrimental to conservation and would be condemned in the strongest terms.

Despite what the zoo proponents try to lead us to believe, the claim of saving wild elephants through captive breeding is absurd. Elephants have no difficulty reproducing in the wild nor in captivity in the range states. Captive breeding is about maintaining elephants in North America and is pure business.

Yet, if such a group were to be established, and breeding were to be successful, what then? Four acres is a tiny space for 6-10 elephants. What will the zoo do as the numbers increase? It will be forced to ship individuals to other facilities, like so many items of cargo - another inhumane zoo practice that will draw further outcry from the public.

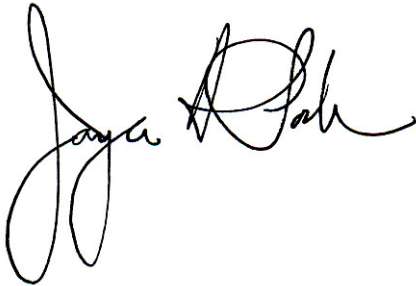
There is ample scientific evidence to declare that an urban zoo - the LA Zoo - cannot meet the basic interests of elephants - male or female. In my opinion, to spend over \$40 million to build a facility that is essentially obsolete before it is even constructed, is ethically and fiscally misguided.

Zoos have an important educational role to play, and I believe good public awareness is vital to ensuring the future survival of wild elephants and the kind treatment of animals. Nevertheless, it is not educational to allow children to believe that elephants are healthy and thriving in insufficient space, when science overwhelmingly shows they are not. Exhibiting elephants that display abnormal behavior caused by cramped conditions is animal abuse. You don't have to be an elephant expert to see that - kids comment on it all the time.

I know that the LA Zoo staff and supporters love Billy - this is not about kind or unkind keepers or members of the public, but about outdated policy. We simply know too much about elephants now to fall back on traditional zoo practice and rhetoric. It is insincere to allow elephants to suffer for the purpose of encouraging our children to appreciate them. Appreciation of the complex lives of elephants can better come from multimedia technology and LA is uniquely suited to lead the way. As an elephant expert I am more than willing to contribute to such a development.

Based on my long experience of studying elephants my strong recommendation is that construction of the new elephant exhibit is halted and the current elephant exhibit closed.

I urge you, the honorable leaders of Los Angeles, to ensure that Billy is sent to a sanctuary-sized facility - to an environment that will permit him the space and autonomy he needs to be an elephant. I look forward to my next visit to Los Angeles at a time when Billy is enjoying his new freedom.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce Poole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joyce" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Poole".

Joyce Poole, PhD
Director Research & Conservation, ElephantVoices