



ElephantVoices
Buskhellenga 3
3236 Sandefjord
Norway

11 January 2006

To whom it may concern,

Re: Statement regarding *Toni*

On January 4th, Petter Granli, my husband and co-Director of ElephantVoices, and I joined Suzanne Roy from *In Defence of Animals*, Amy Mayers of *Friends of Toni*, and zoo and wildlife veterinarian, Mel Richardson, DVM, to meet with the Director of the National Zoo, John Berry, and to see the elephants and their exhibit. Our purpose in visiting the zoo was to speak to Berry about the elephants and to discuss the zoo's future elephant exhibit plans. I was invited to participate because of my 30-year scientific studies of the social behavior and communication of wild elephants. Prior to my visit, numerous colleagues had informed me that the elephant, Toni, had severe arthritis and I had been asked to consider whether I thought she should be sent to the Elephant Sanctuary in Hohenwald, Tennessee. Furthermore, I hoped to persuade the zoo to either close their elephant exhibit permanently, or to set an example to other zoos by using the large Smithsonian-owned property at Front Royal as a model of a modern elephant exhibit - providing space appropriate to the species in a more natural environment.



Petter Granli, www.ElephantVoices.org

Although I already knew that 39-year-old Toni had severe arthritis, I was not prepared for what I witnessed at the enclosure. In all my 30 years of observing wild elephants I have never seen an elephant as crippled as Toni. Almost 20 years ago, at the Scranton Zoo, Toni suffered a broken left ankle (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Note Toni's deformed left ankle.

Years of standing on concrete floors and compacted sandy soil in a small enclosure, with little exercise have exacerbated this injury, for she is now almost unable to walk. Toni shuffles along, only centimeters at a step, with her weight shifted onto her hind legs (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Toni stands with her weight shifted back. Note her outstretched front legs.



Amy Mayers, *Friends of Toni*



Petter Granli, www.ElephantVoices.org

Over the years of compensation, the muscles on Toni's left side have atrophied, and the curvature of her spine and pelvis appear deformed (Figures 3 and 4). Toni is extremely thin and zoo records document that she continues to lose weight.

Figure 4. Toni is emaciated.

I have seen a substantial number of elephants with broken and/or withered legs in the wild, all able to move and keep up with their families, either by putting weight on the injured leg, and walking with a limp, or by hobbling along on three legs. One Amboseli female elephant, 43-year-old Xala, has lived with a left ankle break (similar to Toni's) since the first day she was seen on 5th December 1973. Xala (pictured, Figure 5) is still a healthy, vigorous female, who is able to keep up with her family, reproduce and successfully raise offspring.



Amy Mayers, Friends of Toni



Petter Granli, www.ElephantVoices.org

Figure 5 Xala, a healthy, vigorous female, illustrating left ankle break

Toni's state may be extreme, however, her debilitating condition is indicative of many of the problems experienced by captive elephants and she symbolizes the dismal consequences of long-term lack of space and movement. Toni is yet one more statistic in the overwhelming empirical evidence that (contrary to recent AZA statements) elephants *do* need sufficient space and social and environmental enrichment to maintain agility and good physical health.

We can only speculate about the inner emotional trauma this elephant has experienced in her life, with severe pain on a daily basis being one.

Visitor interpretation at the exhibit states: *“Elephants are one of the most amazing animals on this earth. They are intelligent, caring, and curious. They deserve the best, and through our science, we will make sure that they get the best!”*

I agree wholeheartedly with this statement. But, while the zoo’s elephant keepers, veterinarians and scientists (many of whom I know personally) are undoubtedly doing their best for Toni and the other three elephants, it is simply not possible to meet an elephant’s physical, social and emotional needs in a few acres (and Toni has less than this).



The National Zoo’s elephants are all Asian elephants, a species that inhabits forest and forest-edge habitats in its natural environment. The National Zoo’s barren exhibit couldn’t be further from tropical forest; rather the exhibit is stunning in its bleak desert-like condition (Figures 6 & 7). Ultimately the zoo and its exhibit cannot escape responsibility for Toni’s condition.

Petter Granli, www.ElephantVoices.org

Figure 6. The elephants’ bleak exhibit

The AZA is fond of claiming that the reason for keeping elephants in zoos is that they play an educational and conservation role. Surely, having Toni and the other three elephants in such an impoverished exhibit and claiming that they are receiving “the best” is hardly educational. Visitors to the zoo must wonder why Toni is not able to walk properly. The public should be educated.



Amy Mayers, Friends of Toni

Figure 7. An educational representative of her wild cousins?

Joyce Poole, PhD
Director, ElephantVoices
Research Director, Amboseli Elephant Research Project