

**PRESS CONTACTS:**

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## **FACT SHEET**

- 1. The Los Angeles Zoo provides an important opportunity for all to see elephants**
  - The L.A. Zoo is low priced -- and free for L.A. Unified School District;
  - Sanctuaries are for the wealthy and privileged;
  - Travel to foreign countries to see elephants is for the wealthy and privileged;
  - It's proven that seeing Zoo animals fosters concern for those in the wild.
  
- 2. Critically endangered elephants need everyone's help**
  - Zoos provide an important link to the wild;
  - Elephants in zoos are part of species survival (breeding) programs, which increase the number of elephants, sanctuaries don't breed;
  - The L.A. Zoo contributes thousands of dollars to elephant conservation, sanctuaries don't.
  
- 3. The L.A. Zoo provides excellent care for elephants**
  - Zoos are well staffed with expert care-veterinarians and keepers;
  - Elephants do live long, healthy lives in Zoo;
  - Zoos are humane;
  - A fantastic new elephant exhibit is under construction;
  - 92% of Zoo visitors surveyed in 2006/2007 want a new elephant exhibit;
  - The new elephant exhibit was already voted on and approved by voters and money has been spent.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **WHAT IS THE SIZE, SCOPE AND STATUS OF THE LOS ANGELES ZOO'S NEW ELEPHANT EXHIBIT?**

The exhibit covers a total area of six acres with 3.6 acres available for the elephants. The size of the habitat is just one factor, though. The Zoo's habitat will give elephants a variety of choices including pools, mud holes, waterfalls, waterholes, varied topography and substrates, and a new state-of-the-art barn to manage and care for these animals. The size and features of the habitat is more than sufficient to meet both the physical, mental and intrinsic needs of elephants. You need only drive two hours south to the San Diego Wild Animal Park to see a vibrant healthy herd of elephants in a similar-sized space. The exhibit is designed with the flexibility to hold multiple bulls, aged animals, cows with calves or any other elephants.

**On October 20, 2008, Los Angeles City Councilman Tony Cardenas introduced a measure to stop construction of the exhibit and move elephants permanently out of the L.A. Zoo.**

**At this time 30% of the project has been completed with \$10.3 million spent through September 30, 2008. The exhibit was approved by the City of Los Angeles City Council in 2006 by a 13-2 vote. Nearly \$5 million dollars has been raised by the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association and many of the other funds were voted on by taxpayers to improve the Los Angeles Zoo.**

The new Pachyderm Forest will be more than just an elephant display. The interpretive program will address the conservation needs of Asian elephants in the wild. There are less than 30,000 Asian elephant left in the wild, and the Zoo's exhibit will specifically highlight challenges they face in Thailand, Cambodia, India and China. Over 1.6 million people visit the L.A. Zoo every year; many of these are children who would never be able to see elephants in the wild or a sanctuary.

### **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF ELEPHANTS IN THE WILD?**

Wildlife and wild places no longer exist as they did when the Los Angeles Zoo opened in 1966. Today most wild animals live in protected areas, areas that are managed, sometimes even fenced, to protect them and their habitat from encroachment by people. Some of these areas are very large but they are finite and under constant pressure from human development and activities. Within these managed spaces, where they can be protected from poachers, elephants are doing relatively well. However, political instability in Africa and Asia continue to threaten the existence of these species. In the last few years species like the Northern white rhino, okapi and mountain gorilla – species that live in supposedly protected areas – have been brought to the brink of extinction by the ravages of human wars and the accompanying decimation.

### **WILL THE SAME THING (EXTINCTION) HAPPEN TO ELEPHANTS SOME DAY?**

Possibly – if we do not create a sustainable population for them in zoos. Creating a sustainable population –being an ark for Asian and African elephants is exactly what more than 70 accredited zoos across the United States have committed to do. More than 70 zoos, zoos like the Los Angeles Zoo, the San Diego Zoo and the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park are choosing to make this commitment, choosing to be part of the effort to save these magnificent species.

In the past two years the Los Angeles Zoo have sent \$53,000 to conservation biologists who work with wild populations of elephants throughout Southeast Asia. We hope to encourage visitors to this new facility to make their own contributions towards elephant conservation.

### **WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF ELEPHANTS IN ACCREDITED ZOOS?**

Today, there are 292 elephants in 78 AZA-accredited zoos. 138 are Asian elephants and 154 are African elephants. Elephants, both populations, as a whole are thriving in zoos. This clear and unambiguous statement directly contradicts the assertions of anti-zoo

activists and their supporters. Using fragmented, outdated, and incorrect information, these groups draw erroneous conclusions. While these false conclusions fuel sincere and powerful emotions, they do not stand up to scientific scrutiny or the facts as they now exist.

### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ELEPHANTS TO BE IN ZOOS?**

Elephants, maintained in keeping with zoo accreditation standards, do well in zoological environments. Do they die? As with all of the living species, eventually all of the elephants in zoo care will die. Longevity studies show that elephants have long life-spans in such environments. Do they live longer than their counterparts in the wild? They live as long as those in protected areas and certainly longer than those in unprotected regions. Unfortunately wild elephant populations have been decimated by poaching for ivory and few populations exist that have older elephants. What we can say is that the population of elephants currently living in U.S. zoos is largely a geriatric community and we do not tend to see such elderly elephants in wild populations.

A small handful of zoos have chosen to discontinue holding elephants based on the significant resource-commitment needed to meet AZA's mandatory standards of care. This should not be misinterpreted as a lack of commitment to elephants. Some zoos cannot make this commitment to the effort to save the species, and these zoos are choosing to work with other endangered species instead. According to the AZA Elephant Taxon Advisory Group, the capacity for elephants in accredited zoos is expected to rise from 299 elephants to 532 elephants in the next five years. The Los Angeles Zoo is part of this facility expansion trend, along with San Diego, Washington D.C., Dallas and other major cities. State-of-the-art elephant habitats will better meet the needs of elephants and are being constructed with high science-based standards in mind.

### **GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF A ZOO THAT HAS A SUCCESSFUL ELEPHANT BREEDING PROGRAM**

The San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park made a long term commitment to elephants when it imported a family group from Swaziland in 2003. This group was designated to be culled, killed, by the park rangers in Swaziland as part of their effort to manage an elephant population that has overgrown their national park. The San Diego Zoo stepped in, spending millions of dollars to save these animals and bring them to San Diego.

They made this effort despite the actions of a few small groups who tried to stop them. In fact, the groups that tried to stop them stated in federal court that they would rather see this group of elephants die than in a zoo.

The San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park disagreed with their opinion and moved forward, saving these elephants, managing a herd at the Wild Animal Park that has now produced 4 babies. They are currently expanding their commitment to elephants through the development of a 2.5 acre home for up to 9 elephants at the Zoo and this will also allow them to expand its elephant facility at the Wild Animal Park and continue its successful breeding program at that location.

## **HAVE OTHER SPECIES BEEN SAVED IN A SIMILAR EFFORT TO THE ELEPHANT BREEDING PROGRAM?**

More than 20 years ago – when the San Diego Zoo and Los Angeles Zoo began working to save the California condor – there were people who had strong feelings, who said they cared about condors and who did not believe condors should be in a zoo, and who tried to stop the work of Zoos who were working to save the species. And today – more than 100 California condors fly free in the skies of California, Arizona and Mexico.

## **WHAT IS THE LIFE SPAN OF AN ELEPHANT?**

The science shows that elephants in accredited zoos are as long-lived as elephants in the wild. The average life expectancy for female Asian elephants in professionally-managed zoological facilities in North America is 44.8 years. An Asian elephant can live to be 65 years old, just like a human can live to be 120 – this is their potential lifespan. However, the proper measure of longevity is “average life expectancy”. For a female Asian elephant, this is about 45, just as for humans it is about 75. Just like humans, some elephants live less than the average, and some live longer. There is no evidence of any difference between zoo and wild populations, and this is one important measure of the excellent care they receive.

## **WHY ARE ELEPHANTS THRIVING IN ACCREDITED ZOOS?**

High standards of animal care and welfare are required for membership in AZA. Elephants have always been a high priority, but in 2003, AZA’s Standards for Elephant Care and Management became mandatory for all elephant holding institutions. These standards are regularly evaluated and updated to ensure that AZA’s elephant population is healthy. In addition, the assertion by zoo critics that virtually all elephants in zoo environments suffer from arthritis or foot problems is absolutely false and cannot be factually substantiated. The AZA elephant survey showed that only a small percentage of the elephants are currently being treated for some sort of foot problem or arthritis. The large majority of these animals are older and beyond their normal life expectancy.

In addition, elephants are thriving in accredited zoos because of zoos' elephant care expertise. The elephant care professionals at AZA-accredited zoos are the experts on the health and welfare of elephants representing an extensive network of scientific advisors covering the disciplines of nutrition, veterinary medicine, pathology, behavior, reproduction, population management, education, and research,. AZA-accredited elephant holding facilities employ an average of 4.89 full-time, elephant care staff – totaling 382 professionals nationwide. Each of these professionals has an average of over 11 years of experience working with elephants which collectively represents over 3,800 years of elephant care expertise. In plain English, these elephant professionals dedicate their life to taking care of elephants – they know how to take good care of elephants, and that’s what they do.

Further: elephants are thriving in accredited zoos as a result of infrastructure Improvements. The commitment to elephants at AZA-accredited zoos is strong and growing. Sixty-one AZA-accredited zoos have recently or are planning to significantly upgrade their elephant facilities.

Another essential piece of the puzzle in the comprehensive plan to care for and conserve elephants is the development of an elephant center, where zoos can share resources and knowledge and provide even more support for these magnificent animals. The creation of The National Elephant Center was announced in 2008, and it will be an operational, cost-effective resource for all AZA-accredited zoos in 2009.

## **WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW IN THE DISCUSSION OF ELEPHANTS IN ZOOS?**

Zoos and aquariums are woven into the fabric of American life – 175 million people visit accredited zoos and aquariums each year – more than half the U.S. population. Zoos teach children about the natural world. In the last 10 years, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums formally trained more than 400,000 teachers, supporting science curricula with effective teaching materials and hands-on opportunities for children to connect with wildlife. Every year, school field trips at zoos & aquariums connect more than 15 million students with the natural world. The Los Angeles Zoo has served as a living classroom for more than a million children, and elephants have always played a central role in that experience.

Elephants in AZA-accredited zoos help make emotional connections with visitors and change behaviors that positively impact elephants and other wildlife conservation. In a Harris Interactive poll, 95 percent of Americans said that seeing elephants in zoos helps people appreciate them more. That same poll found that 86 percent of respondents believe that visiting zoos and aquariums encourages people to get involved in conservation.

**Without a cutting-edge exhibit like Pachyderm Forest, only the rich of Los Angeles will be able to travel to see elephants, one of earth's most amazing creatures and a wonder that the children of Los Angeles deserve to see.**

## **WHAT KIND OF CONFUSION AND INCORRECT INFORMATION EXISTS ABOUT ELEPHANTS IN ZOOS?**

Zoo management has changed drastically for many species since the Los Angeles Zoo opened at its current location in 1966. As an example, species like gorillas, which at one time were extremely difficult to manage in zoos are now housed in complex social and breeding groups where their numbers are carefully managed to sustain a genetically and viable captive population. And gorillas are just one example of how Zoos manage animals differently today than in 1966. These new management philosophies and strategies extend to the elephants as well.

The elephant management at the Los Angeles Zoo prior to 1994 had not changed dramatically since elephants were first housed at the old Griffith Park Zoo, but in 1994, the Zoo adopted a new elephant management strategy to improve the health and well-being of the elephants under its care. The first step was to redesign the barn where the elephants were housed at night. Doing so allowed the elephants to have 24-hour access to yards and the barn which eliminated the need to chain elephants overnight. This gave the elephants choices for substrates such as indoor heated floors, sand, dirt, mulch, mud wallows and pools. Aside from the physical improvements to the exhibit

space, the procedures for the staff's handling and care for the animals were vastly improved and an enrichment program was developed to encourage species specific behavior. A team of keepers and supervisors was assembled, based on the individuals desire to work elephants and ability to work with other keepers, veterinarians and management staff in a team environment. New and existing staff were part of this team.

Along with the new team came a new elephant staff training program. Regardless of the keeper's previous level of elephant experience, everyone went through the same process. The first six months to a year, the new elephant keepers would work in and around the barn, learning safety protocols, appropriate husbandry practices, observing elephant behavior and learning the idiosyncrasies of the individual elephants in the barn. This allowed them to have exposure to the elephants and just as importantly allowed the elephants to get to know them. When it had been determined that a bond of trust had developed between the keeper and the elephants, the keeper would be paired with an experienced handler, as a trainee, to be taught the basics of elephant handling and training. At the point when the trainee had reached a high level of competence, he/she would be become an elephant handler. New management procedure required that two experienced handlers would always be present when working with the elephants and that no one would be allowed to enter an elephant area alone. In addition, the program also included assessing the needs of individual elephants and structuring their daily routines and training based on their individual personalities, and temperaments and physical abilities. Today the Los Angeles Zoo's elephant team consists of three full time elephant handles and an elephant manager and the Zoo's curator of mammals, bringing a total combined 81 years experience in working with elephants.

### **IS THE LOS ANGELES ZOO'S ELEPHANT, BILLY, DOING WELL?**

Currently the Zoo houses one elephant, a 23 year old male elephant named Billy, with whom the Zoo's team of handlers has a tremendous rapport. He responds enthusiastically to them and is excited when they show up at the barn to work with him. He is very responsive during training, exercise and routine health and medial procedures. One of the reasons he was not moved during construction of the new exhibit is because he has such a great relationship with the elephant staff and trust in its members. Billy is a very valuable male to the North American herd of Asian elephants and the plan is for him to be the centerpiece of a planned breeding herd in the new Pachyderm Forest. Billy does exhibit a bobbing behavior, this is an anticipatory behavior associated with his feeding or while he is in the company of his keepers. His behavior has been extensively studied by zoo scientists and it is not life-threatening. It is a comforting or thumb-sucking behavior.

### **WHAT ABOUT SENDING BILLY TO A SANCTUARY?**

Sanctuaries are for animals that don't have any options. Billy has options, and the new Pachyderm Forest will be a great habitat for him and the other elephants that will join him. Sanctuaries are not open to the public and do not allow breeding. In 2007, the L.A. Zoo sent an older post-reproductive female African elephant to a sanctuary. As the new exhibit will focus on Asian elephants, we felt the sanctuary would be a good fit for her. Unfortunately, it is cost-prohibitive for many of our patrons to visit an elephant sanctuary as the two elephant sanctuaries in the U.S. charge at least \$200 per person per day to

visit. The Los Angeles Zoo's Pachyderm Forest will offer children and adults and affordable opportunity to see the world's largest land animal.

### **WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL SIZE OF THE ELEPHANT HERD IN THE NEW PACHDYERM FOREST?**

There are no immediate plans to house 11 elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo. The number 11 comes from the fact the barn being built is sized to house as many as 11 elephants and still exceeds the current AZA standards for elephant barns. The extra space is really to afford flexibility in the managing our herd as it changes size, up and down, for years to come; not just to fill it up at the beginning. Our hope is to start with a small breeding group of one male and three female elephants. The large barn then gives us room to grow as calves are born. The ultimate size of our Zoo herd will be determined by our operating budget and the ability of the exhibit space to support the elephants. We will grow into the space based on our ability to support the elephants.