

29th January 2019

Attention:
Mr Mayor Herman Mashaba
Executive Mayor
The City of Johannesburg
Gauteng

Attention:
Mr Bryne Maduka
Managing Director
Johannesburg City Parks & Zoo (NPC)
Gauteng

OPEN LETTER BY ELEPHANT SPECIALISTS

Re. Lammie, the lone female elephant at Johannesburg Zoo

We, the undersigned elephant specialists, would like to set the record straight in the case of the lone female elephant, Lammie, at the Johannesburg Zoo, South Africa. There have been various media reports stating that Lammie cannot be released into a free roaming situation as she has been at the zoo for all her life. There have been further statements by zoo personnel and spokespersons, and most recently a press release, stating that Lammie:

- a) has good welfare,
- b) has strong bonds with her keepers,
- c) serves a strong educational role, and
- d) is an ambassador for conservation.

The Zoo states they have consulted with 'specialists' regarding Lammie, but none of the undersigned local and world-leading elephant specialists have been consulted. Here we aim to correct some of the misinformation that has been circulated.

Data was collected on the behaviour of both Lammie and zoo visitors' visiting her during October 2018 and January 2019 (this report is available on request).

a) Welfare in captivity:

It is well documented that some species adapt to life in captivity, but some do not. Elephants demonstrably fall into the latter category, adapting poorly to life in captive facilities. They have shorter life-spans in captivity than in wild populations (*Clubb & Mason 2002; Clubb et al 2009*), and they breed poorly if at all in captivity. As such, there has been a ca. 10% long-term decline of elephants in zoos in general. There is a global trend for modern zoos to refrain from housing elephants because of their significant physiological, behavioural and social needs. Worldwide, 155 zoos since 2000 have already closed their elephant facilities, as zoo Directors realise that they cannot provide elephants with adequate facilities.

Solitary keeping:

Moreover, as a highly social, cognitive and intelligent animal, elephants require adequate social groups. All renowned zoo associations (EAZA, AZA, BIAZA) require that elephants are kept in a social unit of at least 3-4 females. Even if the Zoo acquires another elephant (as they have publicly

stated they will do) there will only be two elephants, with no guarantee that they will get on. If one of them dies, the same situation of one lone elephant is repeated.

Environmental Enrichment (EE):

Modern zoos provide their elephants with Environmental Enrichment (*a requirement by BIAZA, AZA and WAZA; Poole & Granli 2008; Thomas 2002*). This is important to stimulate the brain (*Cotman & Berchtold 2002*), provide adequate movement and allow the elephant to express all its natural behaviours (one of the basic “Five Freedoms of Welfare”).

- Our observations on Lammie showed that she spends most of her time standing by the wall close to the Elephant House.
- Despite statements by the Zoo that they are providing Environmental Enrichment, there is nothing in the enclosure other than a few fixed tires, which she was never seen interacting with.
- The keepers were not observed interacting with Lammie, other than giving her food.

b) Bonding:

One of the most crucial aspects of elephant welfare is providing an adequate social environment. Elephants are highly social beings with very strong life-long bonds between females and their offspring. Elephants are highly intelligent, cognitive, sentient beings with emotional brains similar to humans (*Bradshaw G.A. & Shore A.N. 2007; Bates L.A., Poole J.H. & Byrne R.W. 2008*). Keeping of a single female elephant severely compromises her welfare, since the essence of being a female elephant is being part of a bonded family group.

Although we acknowledge that strong bonds can occur between elephants and their handlers, given the freedom of choice, they will always choose to be free. It has been documented that ex-trained elephants once released show no interest in humans after a certain stage during the reintegration process if all the protocols for the reintegration have been followed, (*Evans et al 2013 a, b; Pretorius and Mitchell 2019 unpubl.*), no matter how strong the bond to a person is. They will accept the presence of people without aggression and choose to range freely (*Evans et al 2013 a, b*).

c) Public Education:

The data collected on the visitors’ behaviour showed that:

- a) the average time spent by visitors at the enclosure was 2.46 minutes
- b) over 50% of the visitors just walked by without stopping, 43% stood for a short while and only 6.6% sat down to watch Lammie.

The public is not given information on either the intricate social behaviour, communication, bonding and family life of elephants, or their role in ecosystem conservation. Neither are they provided with information on the dire status of elephants that are being decimated by severe poaching and conflict with growing human populations. Watching one lone elephant does nothing to provide any of the above information and provides a totally inaccurate and misleading picture of elephant life.

Lammie’s role in education and acting as an ambassador of her species is false, misleading and educates the public incorrectly.

In summary, one of the most important and basic principles of animal welfare in zoos is to provide the animal with an environment that is compliant with their natural social setting and to ensure that they can perform most of their normal, natural behaviours. Furthermore, it is widely accepted that welfare refers to the affective (emotional) state (Mason G. J. & Veasey J. S. 2010; Veasey J. S. 2017). Basic welfare (in addition to the “5 Freedoms”) should provide elephants with adequate enrichment, an adequate social environment and freedom of choice. The independent observations made during October 2018 and January 2019 demonstrate that Lammie benefits from none of these.

- Besides her night house, Lammie has no permanent shade in her enclosure other than a few trees at the edges of the enclosure which only provide shade at certain times of the day. *Without shade, she cannot be said to be free from discomfort.*
- She has no pool in which she can partially or fully submerge herself, and it appears that she does not receive a shower or is hosed down to cool her during the summer heat. *Without the ability to bathe, she cannot be said to be free to express normal behaviour.*
- The mud wallow contained very little water during the October observations, but more following the rain in January. *Without the ability to wallow in mud, she cannot be said to be free to express normal behaviour.*
- There are no large objects (boulders, tree stumps etc.) to provide her with scratching opportunities. *Without the ability to scratch, she cannot be said to be free from discomfort or free to express normal behaviour.*
- She was provided with only one or two small branches once a day during the observation periods and no branches were seen lying around during the dry season, but she received more branches at different periods of the day during the rainy season. *This is contrary to her right to express normal behaviour.*
- Despite the press statement by the zoo that they scatter her food for enrichment, this was never seen during observation hours. She was given food on one spot, although in three different feeding places. *This is contrary to her right to express normal behaviour.*
- Lammie was observed sweeping together sand from the natural ground and eating this. Ingestion of earth has been seen in elephants to supplement minerals in the diet (Warren et al 1996). However, colic symptoms have been noted in elephants consuming large quantities of sand/clay. A nutritionally complete diet should not necessitate eating of soil. *This may suggest her right to freedom from hunger and thirst, and pain, injury or disease is being compromised.*
- As a lone elephant, she has no social environment. *This is contrary to her right to express normal behaviour.*
- During the observation periods conducted during the zoo’s visiting hours, no staff spent time with her. They were only seen going to the enclosure to give her food and then left without any interaction. *The total lack of social interaction, with other elephants or people, is contrary to her right to express normal behaviour.*
- She has limited freedom of choice, as food is provided at specific times and she cannot choose to do body care or have a social interaction. *Her right to express normal behaviour is clearly and entirely missing.*

Release of captive or trained elephants to the wild:

The reintegration of a captive elephant back into the wild has been repeatedly successfully demonstrated, provided there is a long-term reintroduction program. The elephants that have been successfully reintroduced were either born in captivity or were placed into captivity as young as 3yrs of age and spent, in a number of cases, > 30 years in captivity prior to being reintegrated. Thus, the zoo's argument that Lammie has been captive for too long and can therefore not be reintegrated, is simply incorrect. There are several examples to demonstrate this: The two ex-circus elephants released into Pilanesberg in the 80's (*Anderson 1986; Moore et al. 1989; Moore 2000*) and over 20 ex-trained riding elephants from elephant-back-safari operations in South Africa and Botswana, including two cows who have now had their first offspring in the wild; these cows are from two separate reintegration programs (*Pretorius and Mitchell unpubl. 2019, Evans et al 2013a, b*). The Botswana study demonstrated no significant short-term welfare problems for the released elephants or recipient population, with ex-captive females producing calves of their own and associating with wild herds and with newly released ex-captive females to form a stable group (*Evans et al 2013a, b*).

Finally, the Zoo has referred to the death of the Bloemfontein elephant after being released into a wild system as a motivation to prevent release and re-integration for Lammie. However, it was shown that this elephant died of botulism, so this is not a strong counter argument to her release.

There is a global trend towards recognising that the specific and extensive needs of elephants cannot be adequately met in captivity, and people are increasingly becoming aware that watching a lone, stressed or depressed elephant in a very limited enclosure is neither educational nor entertaining. As well as addressing Lammie's welfare in the best possible way, we believe that allowing her to be rehabilitated to a free-roaming social group would be an immense public relations 'win' for Johannesburg Zoo, the city, and the country as a whole, highlighting an ethical approach to the management of elephants.

Yours sincerely

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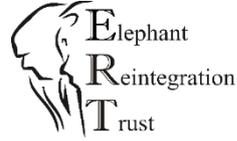
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