

OUT OF THE ZOO



FRIENDS OF WOODLAND PARK ZOO ELEPHANTS

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Factsheet: Oklahoma City Zoo

This factsheet clarifies misleading and inaccurate information presented by Oklahoma City Zoo and Woodland Park Zoo regarding the transfer of elephants Bamboo and Chai. The factsheet clearly shows that Oklahoma City Zoo is a poor choice for Bamboo and Chai and will further diminish their quality of life.

Space

Contrary to the zoo's claims that elephants have access to 3.95 acres at Oklahoma City Zoo, the females and calves have access to only 2.6 acres.¹

Rex, the male elephant, is separated on just a half acre. This means that with the addition of Bamboo and Chai, six female elephants will have less than a half acre each (0.44). At Woodland Park Zoo, the elephants currently have over a half acre each (0.55). If Bamboo and Chai fail to integrate with Oklahoma's elephants, they will have even less space as it will require that the elephants be kept in separate areas.

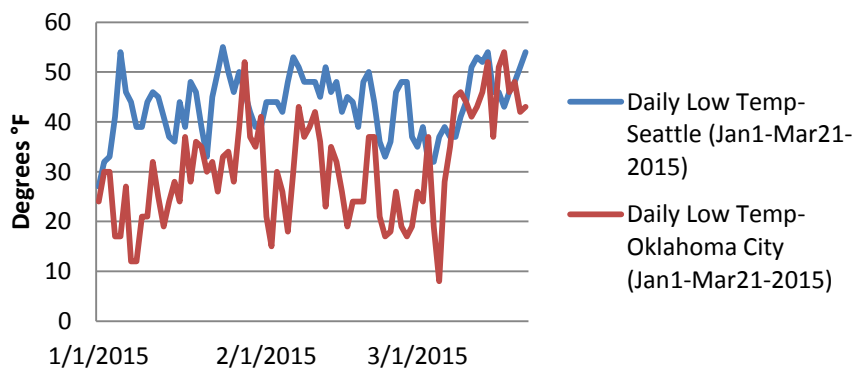


Climate

Oklahoma City has colder winters and hotter summers than Seattle and is prone to frequent and severe tornadoes. Weather data shows that Oklahoma City experiences snow for four months in winter. As of March 4, 2015, the zoo had been closed due to weather for about 7 of the previous 11 days.

The "Zoo Temperature 2015" chart shows for the period of January 1, 2015 through March 16, 2015 Oklahoma City Zoo daily low temperatures fall well below Seattle's low temperatures the majority of the time.

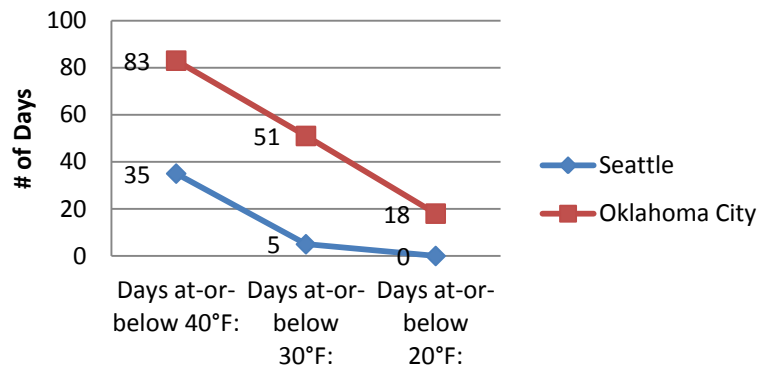
Zoo Temperatures 2015



Laura Bottaro, the Oklahoma’s animal curator, stated, "If it is freezing, the elephants stay in the barn." If Oklahoma follows the same protocol as Woodland Park Zoo, the elephants would be kept in the barn when temperatures are 40 degrees or below. From December 1st, 2014 through March 16th, 2015, the elephants would have been held indoors for 83 out of 106 days, or 78% of the time
 Source: www.wunderground.com/history.

Cold Weather Comparison

106 Days: Dec. 1, 2014 to Mar. 16, 2015



Pictured above is a view of one of the stalls at the Oklahoma City Zoo where elephants are kept during periods of cold or during extreme weather conditions such as the threat of tornados. These caged enclosures lack space, natural light, and enrichment to keep the elephants’ minds engaged during these extended periods of confinement. The elephants’ movement is restricted and they are forced to stand on hard substrate, which causes pain foot problems and arthritis, which are among the leading causes of death for captive elephants.

Integration

Woodland Park Zoo and Oklahoma City Zoo rely on the assumption that Bamboo and Chai will integrate with the zoo’s existing four elephants, going so far as assigning Bamboo and Chai roles as “matriarch” and “aunties.”² This expectation contradicts Woodland Park Zoo’s own assertion that integrating Bamboo may prove to be a challenge, especially given that the Oklahoma has two young calves. In a January 14th, 2005 press release addressing Bamboo’s relocation to Tacoma’s Point Defiance Zoo, the zoo stated:

“Bamboo occasionally has displayed aggressive behavior toward Hansa and does not appear to have the skills necessary to safely play a constructive role within a herd with young calves. Bamboo’s unpredictable behavior poses a significant challenge to managing the four elephants as one integrated herd.”³

Point Defiance also stated at the time that “Bamboo doesn’t exhibit predictable social skills toward newborns and very young calves” and called her transfer a win-win situation stating that “The zoo staffs have carefully assessed both herds and are very confident”⁴ about the plan. Yet, Point Defiance was unable to integrate Bamboo and returned her to Seattle less than a year later. Woodland Park and Oklahoma are similarly “confident” that Chai and Bamboo will be able to be integrated at Oklahoma.

Oklahoma has not stated how it plans to integrate the elephants, only saying that if the elephants are incompatible, “We can alternate animals on and off”⁵ likely leading to the similar dysfunctional management that Woodland Park Zoo employed due to incompatibility issues, whereby one elephants was separated from the other elephants for extended periods of time.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is a widespread problem within the U.S. zoo and circus industries. The number of culture positive elephants affects approximately 18%⁶ of Asian elephants. In fact, the Oregon Zoo in Portland is currently treating three Asian elephants for TB and new records show that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus is riddled with the disease with nearly two dozen elephants “diagnosed with a human strain of TB that is easily transmittable to workers, the public and other elephants.”⁷

Sanctuaries provide refuge for elephants who come from zoos and circuses, so it’s no surprise that a few of the elephants are affected by diseases, like TB. A key difference between zoos and sanctuaries is that sanctuaries have the space to adequately quarantine and treat elephants who have been exposed to TB or have active TB.

Prior to the recent relocation of three elephants from the Toronto Zoo elephants to the PAWS sanctuary in California, an independent infectious disease specialist conducted an intensive review of PAWS' TB biohazard protocols quarantine facilities as a condition of the elephants’ retirement. The report found that “The testing and management protocols used at the PAWS facility are based on the USDA endorsed guidelines for the control of tuberculosis in elephants.” To date, Oklahoma City Zoo has not shared any management protocol for TB.

Rex, Oklahoma’s male elephant, had a positive reaction to a serologic test called the Stat Pak. The serologic testing was developed because the trunk wash is notoriously unreliable with poor sensitivity.⁸ It is not at all uncommon for an elephant to be diagnosed with TB only upon necropsy. Trunk washes, which the zoo calls the “gold standard of diagnosis” are accurate when the outcome is positive, but they have many false negatives. In a 2009 report,⁹ only 58% of the elephants with necropsy-confirmed TB had positive trunk-wash cultures before death; the other 42% had been shedding TB undetected. In 2013 the Stat Pak was replaced by the DPP test. This was not, as the zoo claims, because the Stat Pak was inaccurate. The Stat Pak had 100% sensitivity and 95% specificity; the DPP has the same sensitivity rate and only slightly higher specificity (100%). The slightly improved specificity as well as “operational benefits” (DPP made it easier to read the test results) were the stated reasons for switching tests.¹⁰

Given the uncertainty around testing methods, the inability to conclusively determine whether Oklahoma City Zoo has elephants with latent TB, and that one of their elephants has tested positive on a Stat Pak, it would be advisable to err on the side of caution and not expose Bamboo and Chai or other elephants to TB.

Elephant endotheliotropic herpesviruses (EEHV)

Relocating Bamboo and Chai to Oklahoma City Zoo could have dire consequences for the zoo's young elephants and any future elephants born at the zoo. Woodland Park Zoo's veterinarian, Darin Collins, recently stated "we wouldn't rule that [breeding Chai in Oklahoma] out as a possibility." At Dickerson Park Zoo, where Chandra and Asha previously lived before Oklahoma, out of five elephants infected with the deadly herpesvirus, four died. The only surviving elephant is Chandra, who responded to treatment after falling ill. This highly contagious, potentially lethal virus is particularly deadly to young Asian elephants. The virus killed Hansa at Woodland Park in 2007, which exposed Chai and Bamboo and could put other elephants at risk.

Hansa (6), Chai's daughter, died from a strain of herpesvirus (EEHV3) endemic only to African elephants. Hansa, Chai, and Bamboo lived with Watoto, an African elephant. Watoto tested positive for the same strain of herpesvirus that killed Hansa. Woodland Park Zoo's own veterinarians have observed that this particular virus appears to be the deadliest of elephant herpesviruses, attacking larger blood vessels and more organ systems.

This herpesvirus attacks young Asian calves and causes massive internal hemorrhaging and a horrifically painful death. Oklahoma's two calves, Malee and Aschara, are at risk of infection and death if they are exposed to Bamboo and Chai. In regard to continued breeding at Woodland Park Zoo, Jennifer Conrad, DVM, said: "Since newborn and juvenile Asian elephants . . . are the elephants getting sick and dying from herpes virus, it is imperative that the zoo not expose another newborn/juvenile Asian elephant calf to herpes virus (EEHV3)."

In addressing the potential risks the virus presents, the Oklahoma City Zoo admits that "We don't know yet why some animals get ill and others don't." Given the unknowns about transmission of the virus, the zoo's own uncertainty about the dangers involved, and the elephants' (Chandra, Asha, Bamboo, and Chai) history with the disease it is reckless and irresponsible for the zoo to gamble with the lives of elephants by considering future breeding and introducing more elephants who pose an additional risk.

Amphitheater

A 6,000 seat loud rock amphitheater is located about 600 feet from the elephant exhibit at the Oklahoma City Zoo. The zoo's claims that during concerts "staff have never seen the elephants react to the music" demonstrates a lack of awareness about elephant physiology. Leading experts confirm that elephants have a "well-developed system of communication that makes use of all of their senses - hearing, smell, vision and touch - including an exceptional ability to detect vibrations."¹¹ According to Gay Bradshaw, Ph.D., an expert in the psychology of elephants in captivity and in the wild,

"Elephants are acutely sensitive to touch, sound, and emotions. Their hearing is extremely finely tuned to a wide band of frequencies that can be heard miles away by their ears and through their feet. Beyond the constant city noise of traffic, sirens, drills, and other, diverse electro-magnetic waves, the exposure to deafening concert music and pyrotechnics is excruciating for the sensitive and already severely traumatized captive elephant."

Given the close proximity of the amphitheater to the elephants exhibit, and the fact that elephants have a highly evolved sense of hearing and touch, it is reasonable to believe that activity at the theaters will negatively affect the elephants, especially considering they have no ability to flee.



Aerial view of a section of the Oklahoma City Zoo and the relative close proximity, about 600 feet, of the Amphitheatre to the Elephant Exhibit.

Elephant Performances:

Elephants at the Oklahoma City Zoo are regularly used to perform for visitors. The zoo claims that the presentations are behavioral and involve activities necessary to “facilitate daily care,” yet these presentations are nothing more than a ploy used to attract visitors and do nothing to advance or promote the welfare of the elephants. Contrary to the zoo’s claims, the elephants are in fact forced to perform unnatural “behaviors” and circus-style tricks to loud music, as shown in the following video clips:

Malee, of the Oklahoma City Zoo, sits on her hind legs during a performance celebrating her second birthday: <http://www.newson6.com/story/21980103/elephant-birthday-bash-at-okc-zoo> This is identical to the tricks performed in this circus act (at 2:10): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wgtqot7lleg>

An elephant at Oklahoma does a partial headstand (at 2:54), performs a salute (at 3:07), balances on two legs (at 3:30), poses on a stack of logs with one leg raised could easily stumble and injure herself climbing on or off of the stack (at 4:14), and balances on one leg on a ball and lifts another leg off the ground (at 4:50 and 5:22): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6lro5PjjQc>

These same tricks can also be seen in the following circus act where an elephant balances on one front leg on a stand and lifts the other one foot up (at :27), balances on a board stretched between two tubs with one leg raised (at 1:14), does a partial headstand (at 2:30), stands with one front leg crossed over the other (at 2:51), and performs the exact salute that the Oklahoma City elephant performs, as noted above (at 1:16): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wgtqot7lleg>.

In this media report (at :49), an elephant at the Oklahoma City Zoo stands with all four feet on a small stool (shown right) like the ones used in circuses: <http://www.koco.com/news/elephant-activists-want-to-stop-move-of-two-elephants-to-oklahoma-city/31553694>

Similarly, virtually every circus act includes elephants standing on tubs as shown here (at :08): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wgtqot7lleg> and here (at :28): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPNi8nj0q2Q>

Regardless of what the zoo calls these performances, it is clear that the elephants are expected to perform the very same tricks seen in circuses. It is also clear that these tricks have no practical application and serve no educational or conservation purpose. At sanctuaries, elephants are immersed in a nature and engage in true natural behavior 24/7 without human intervention and without being forced to perform for visitors.



USDA Violations

The Oklahoma City Zoo has a demonstrated history of questionable animal care and management, demonstrated by a litany of violations¹² of the federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Since 2005, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has found the zoo to be in violation at least eight times for handling animals during public exhibition in a way that presented risks to the animals and the public, improper maintenance of animal exhibits to include lack of sanitation and structural strength, and potentially contaminated food, among other issues that presented risks to the welfare of the animals. In 2014, the USDA cited the zoo for putting the “health, comfort, and well-being” of animals in jeopardy by failing to address flooding problems identified in 2009, which were still not addressed five years later. In 2010, the USDA issued an official warning to the zoo for repeated failure to “construct and maintain facilities in such a manner as to protect animals from injury and to contain animals.”

¹ <https://zoodesign.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/elephant-sdt-aotm-february.pdf>

² <http://woodlandparkzblog.blogspot.com/2015/02/bamboo-and-chai-to-join-oklahoma-city.html>

³ http://www.freewpzelephants.org/docs/WPZ_PR_Bamboo_agressive.pdf

⁴ <http://www.pdza.org/files/library/25d2d492099ef3af.pdf>

⁵ <http://animalsnorthwest.com/2015/02/28/woodland-park-zoo-elephants-heading-to-oklahoma-city/>

⁶ http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/downloads/elephant/A%20Brief%20History%20of%20TB%20in%20Elephants.pdf

⁷ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/ringling-bros-elephant-retirement-due-rampant-tb-peta-article-1.2140041>

⁸ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1489565/>

⁹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19261770>

¹⁰ <http://www.usaha.org/Portals/6/Resolutions/2013/resolution30-2013.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.elephantvoices.org/elephant-communication/why-how-and-what-elephants-communicate.html>

¹² Available upon request.