

THE KERULOS CENTER

A WORLD WHERE ANIMALS LIVE IN DIGNITY AND FREEDOM



Dear Delegates to the Los Angeles County Democratic Party:

My name is Gay Bradshaw, PhD, PhD and I am the author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated “Elephants on the Edge: What Animals Teach Us About Humanity.” I am writing this letter in support of the efforts of The Elephant Guardians of Los Angeles to close the Elephants of Asia Exhibit at the Los Angeles Zoo, transfer the three elephants to sanctuary, and end captive elephant breeding in Los Angeles.

I hold two doctorates, one in ecology and the other psychology, and have studied elephant trauma and trauma recovery for fifteen years. My research led to the first formal diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in elephants and provided rigorous scientific proof establishing elephant psychological vulnerability to human violence. I am regarded as the foremost authority on the effects of human violence, including capture and captivity, on elephants.

In 2010, amid intense legal, political, and ethical controversy, the Los Angeles Zoo (LA Zoo) opened a new “Elephants of Asia” exhibit. On one side of the enclosure are two female Asian Elephants, Tina and Jewel, both victims of the circus industry in their early fifties, and on loan from the San Diego Zoo. On the other side, separated from Tina and Jewel, is Billy, a solitary, male Asian elephant. Billy was born in 1985 to a free living elephant community in Malaysia, but kidnapped from his family. Later, in 1989, he was acquired by the LA Zoo, where he has lived in virtual isolation for nearly 30 years, spending his hours bobbing and swaying, repetitive motions indicative of psychological breakdown.

Proponents of keeping elephants in zoos argue that captive elephants ensure the survival of the species. Granted, there are real threats in the wild – poaching and culling – but the answer is not to imprison elephants and breed their babies for zoos. The appropriate answer is to protect wild elephants by supporting strict national and international laws and treaties against the sale and importation of ivory; to support sanctuaries where elephants can live in a setting closer to their natural habitat; and to allocate alternative, sustainable measures in areas prone to poaching.

Zoo proponents also insist that captive elephants who are used to amuse and entertain human visitors act as ambassadors for their species, promote love of elephants and educate our children about endangered animals. While some may find Tina and Jewel’s “curtsey” performance at the LA Zoo “cute”, the fact is elephants do not curtsey or perform tricks in the wild, neither do elephants in the wild bob and sway in dissociative agony as they do in zoos.

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Zoos teach our children all the wrong lessons. Instead of learning respect and care for a species on the brink of extinction, children are taught that captive abuse will save elephants. Zoo elephants cannot be reintroduced to the wild to “save” the species. If the multi-day, highly stressful transport does not kill them, they will suffer and most likely die in the wild because their zoo life does not prepare them to live on their own and integrate into wild herds. Baby zoo elephants are fated to live a life of misery so that they generate revenues that service humans, not the species.

The stress and suffering endured by the three LA Zoo elephants can be measured by the difference between their natural habitat in the wild with that of the zoo exhibit. In the wild, elephants typically walk tens to hundreds of miles a day. Elephants in the LA Zoo are limited to a few acres, with unnaturally hard, arthritis-inducing substrates, including cement at the bottom of their pools. Tina, Billy, and Jewel are subject to the constant clicking of hot-wired fences that are not only disturbing, but prevent the elephants from reaching vegetation that they would naturally seek out. This punitive restriction only underscores their helplessness and hopelessness. Moreover, the elephants cannot use the entire three acre exhibit at any one time. Instead, they are moved on a human schedule through heavy metal gates into different enclosures, with Billy always kept alone.

In addition to the profoundly physically harming enclosure, Billy, Tina, and Jewel live a social existence unheard of in wild elephant communities. The LA Zoo has maintained that male elephants (bulls) isolate themselves in the wild, yet this assertion is in direct contradiction to decades of science that document the reality of elephant life in the wild. All elephants, including males, are part of a complex, tightly knit extended society that encompasses multiple generations. Given science’s understanding that elephant brains and sentience are comparable to our own, conditions at the LA Zoo are appropriately described as those in a prison camp.

The elephants are subjected to yet further violations. The LA Zoo’s so-called “breeding program” is equivalent to rape. Again, given science’s recognition of elephant sentience, this characterization is accurate and is in no way an exaggeration. In captive breeding programs, personnel massage an elephant’s prostate or invade orifices to prompt ejaculation and sperm production for insemination in a female elephant held captive elsewhere. It is highly significant that Billy refuses to ejaculate even though he is in *musth*, a heightened state of sexual arousal. This not only points to his full awareness of what is happening to him, but also of his suffering from the indignities sustained. The zoo’s plan is to use Billy’s sperm to breed more captive elephants who will never be released to the wild or live anywhere resembling their natural habitat – and, like commodities, be moved from one zoo to the next, without their mother’s love or their sisters, brothers, and cousins’ companionship.

Zoo and circus elephants sustain injuries and poor health absent under natural conditions. On average they live only half as long as those in the wild. When elephants are born in zoos, they often die young – victims of disease (e.g., herpes virus) or other injuries. The trauma sustained in captivity transmits and cultivates psychopathology. Elephants commit infanticide, kill each other, and self-harm. These are symptoms of c-PTSD (complex PTSD), a formal psychological and psychiatric diagnosis that was developed to describe the devastating effects of torture and captivity.

In summary, the entire captive enterprise is perverse. What people see when they visit the LA Zoo are not normal healthy elephants, but highly traumatized individuals teetering on the edge of total breakdown. The City of Los Angeles has always been a model of progress and ethics, and should join other cities – New York, Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, and London – in closing their captive elephant exhibit. Please choose to be a leader in this cause that is compelled by science and plain decency. Support the Elephant Guardians of Los Angeles by advocating to close the Elephants of Asia Exhibit at the Los Angeles Zoo, end the captive breeding of elephants and send Billy, Tina, and Jewel to an appropriate sanctuary where they can live out their lives with some degree of comfort, peace, privacy, and security.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G.A. Bradshaw', with a small dot at the end.

G.A. Bradshaw PhD, PhD
Founder and Executive Director