



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

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## Elephants Ailing in U.S. Zoos

### New Report to Feds Reveals Majority of Zoo Elephants Suffered from Painful Disorders

*Washington, D.C.*--A majority of elephants in U.S. Zoos have suffered from painful, and often fatal, foot disease, a new report to the federal government reveals. The report, based on a survey of veterinary records from 2000 through 2005 at nearly half of U.S. zoos holding elephants, is the first such an extensive review of veterinary records that has ever been done.

The report, which surveyed veterinary records for elephants at 46 percent of Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)-accredited zoos, also reveals high rates of other health problems, such as joint and reproductive disorders, that are seriously eroding quality of life for elephants in zoos. Its key findings include:

- 62 percent of elephants in zoos suffered from foot disease, including chronic abscesses, bone infection, toe fractures, and cracks, fissures and ulcerations.
- 42 percent of elephants suffered from joint disorders, frequently causing lameness and extreme pain. Autopsy reports revealed elephants with severe arthritis, including bone on bone contact, a condition that would be “excruciatingly painful” according to veterinary experts.
- 73 percent of pregnancies involved complications, with 9 stillbirths. There is also a high rate of early infertility, including elephants who have “flat-lined” as early as age 23-28 years, years during which they would normally be reproducing.

“The state of elephant health in the U.S. is appallingly poor,” said Elliot M. Katz, DVM, President of IDA. “The medical records don’t lie: elephants are suffering and dying from disorders directly related to inadequate zoo environments.”

Katz said that being confined to too-small spaces and being forced to stand on hard surfaces like concrete for prolonged periods of time leads to the premature and painful deaths of elephants in zoos. Arthritis and foot problems are the leading causes of euthanasia for elephants in zoos. The vast majority of zoos in IDA’s survey held elephants in outdoor enclosures of an acre or less, and most zoos had concrete-floored barns.

Elephants are earth’s largest land mammals. They are physically vigorous animals, who move almost continuously for 20 out of every 24 hours and are capable of walking tens of miles a day.

IDA collected the medical records from public zoos, using state open records laws. According to Katz, not even the zoo industry or regulatory agencies have done such a broad survey based on actual health records.

IDA submitted its report in response to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)’s request for public comments on captive elephant welfare. The USDA enforces the federal Animal Welfare Act, and IDA has submitted a citizens’ petition to the USDA charging that zoos are violating the Act by failing to provide adequate conditions to elephants.

The IDA report directly contradicts claims by the AZA about the health of elephants in zoos.

Zoo records are available online and are available for the public to see at <http://helpelephants.com/records>.

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