



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

June 25, 2007

Via Fax

William R. Foster, Director
Birmingham Zoo
2630 Cahaba Road
Birmingham, AL 35223

Fax: 205-879-9426

Dear Mr. Foster,

I am writing to request copies of the veterinary records and full necropsy report on Mona, the elephant who was euthanized this week at Birmingham Zoo. Further, I write to urge you to permanently close the zoo's elephant exhibit, as it has neither the space nor the natural conditions needed to meet the vast physical, psychological and social needs of this highly complex and far-ranging species.

Veterinary Records

By this letter, IDA is officially requesting copies of all veterinary records for the elephant, Mona, from January 1, 2000 through present. We are also requesting a copy of Mona's gross necropsy report, which should be available immediately, and the final necropsy report when available.

If Mona's medical records and necropsy report uphold your claim that she was healthy until her death, you should have no objection to publicly releasing these important records.

Mona's health records are a matter of great public interest, especially since the Zoo receives substantial taxpayer support through public funding from the City of Birmingham, Jefferson County, and the cities of Homewood and Mountain Brook. Therefore, there should be no barrier to their public release.

As a former president of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), you are no doubt aware of the high rate of foot disease and arthritis in captive elephants. Zoo industry sources, including The Elephant's Foot, the premier reference text on this subject, indicate that lack of space in zoo exhibits and unyielding substrates like concrete and compacted soil damage elephants' feet and joints. As you know, these conditions are the leading cause of euthanasia in zoo elephants and often claim elephant lives decades before their natural time. As you are also aware, arthritis and foot disease are extremely painful, degenerative conditions that greatly erode elephants' quality of life, no matter how long-lived these individuals. Birmingham Zoo has first-hand experience with this problem as Mona's companion Susie was reportedly treated for arthritis.

The public deserves to know the nature and true extent of Mona's condition. This can only be revealed through complete disclosure of the veterinary records and necropsy reports, therefore, we urge you to voluntarily release the requested information.

Closing the Elephant Exhibit

As you know, elephants are highly intelligent and socially complex individuals. In the wild, elephants live in tightly-knit family groups, with mothers and daughters staying together for life. Elephants are biologically designed for almost constant movement, walking up to ten or more miles a day in the wild.

By holding small numbers of unrelated individuals in small exhibits of a few acres or less, zoos are failing to meet the physical and psychological needs of earth's largest land mammal. Today, the bar for captive elephant care is being set not by zoos but by the two U.S. elephant sanctuaries that offer hundred to thousands of acres of habitat, freedom of choice in social interactions, and the natural conditions that elephants need to thrive. You have stated that your zoo cared greatly about Mona and gave her the best available care. However, no amount of care or medical attention can compensate for the fact that the environment zoos provide for elephants simply fails to meet their physical and psychological needs, resulting in a poor quality of life, painful health conditions, and, often, premature death.

As a result, the Birmingham Zoo elephant exhibit should be permanently closed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elliot M. Katz".

Elliot M. Katz, DVM
President