



10 November 2011  
Councillors  
Toronto City Council

I am writing to support the decision taken by the Board of the Toronto Zoo to close their elephant exhibit and to send the elephants to a more appropriate location. I also support the decision by the Toronto City Council that the destination for the move should be the PAWS Sanctuary in San Andreas, California.

I have studied the behaviour of elephants and worked for their conservation and welfare for 36 years, having worked with Amboseli Elephant Research Project, Kenya, since 1975. I am currently a member of its Scientific Advisory Board. For the last 10 years I have also Co-Directed the organization, ElephantVoices, including its latest elephant conservation initiative, Elephant Partners, in the Maasai Mara, Kenya, which is home to over 3,000 free-ranging elephants.

It is in the elephant range states that elephant survival will be decided and where elephant conservation funds should be spent. Contrary to recent zoo rhetoric, elephant survival is in no way dependent upon keeping and breeding a few individuals in zoos. If zoos are serious about preventing local extinction of elephants, providing the public with the possibility to engage with field projects will do more for education and conservation than keeping deprived elephants held behind bars in unsuitable climates. Meanwhile, concern for the well being of those individuals held captive must be a priority.

I am aware that the elephant keepers at the Toronto Zoo are expressing concern over the decisions taken to move the remaining Toronto elephants. The keepers apparently feel that PAWS is not an appropriate destination for elephants because it is not accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquaria (AZA). The keepers have also expressed that their opinion should carry more weight since they are the most knowledgeable about the needs of the elephants.

I do not want to belittle the expertise of captive elephant handlers, who I am confident have a great deal of experience with elephant husbandry and are dedicated and caring people. However, it is fair to say that the keepers are unlikely to be a disinterested party as the departure of the elephants will have a direct impact on their own lives and livelihoods. For this reason they may not be the best equipped to determine the interests of the elephants. In addition, I do not believe that they have had the experience to observe and truly understand natural elephant behaviour.

While I have not visited the Toronto Zoo, I have visited many accredited zoos in North America - including in Canada - and have observed the behaviour of elephants in these institutions. In comparison to the behaviour of wild elephants, I have found the activities and demeanour of elephants in these facilities to be severely deprived.

I have also visited the PAWS sanctuary on a number of occasions. These visits permitted me the opportunity to observe the elephants there and to compare their behavior with that of elephants in North American Zoos. As an expert in elephant behavior, my opinion is that, of any captive facility I have visited, the behavior of elephants at PAWS most closely approaches that of free-living wild elephants. This is because the elephants at PAWS have the space to roam, the possibility to forage naturally and to engage with a range of social partners, as well as autonomy over their daily lives and the peace within which to make choices. I have also had the pleasure to witness the positive change in behavior of elephants who have come to PAWS from traditional zoos.

In relation to the allegation that PAWS is not accredited by the AZA, it would be worth analyzing the reasons why it is not, rather than using such charges to falsely suggest that PAWS maintains lower standards for the well being of its elephants, when, in my opinion, the reverse is the case. No captive situation can replace the wild for these magnificent, intelligent and highly social animals, but PAWS does a great job toward allowing elephants to be elephants living out their lives as happily as is possible in a captive situation. The Toronto keepers risk doing "their elephants" a great disservice by trying to prevent their move to PAWS.

I wholeheartedly support the decision by the Board to send the elephants to the PAWS sanctuary and urge you to withstand any attempts to return to the status quo.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce Poole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joyce" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Poole".

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