

Tuli Elephants The World's Elephant Experts Speak Out

Affidavit Concerning the Capture, Treatment and Condition of the Elephant Calves from the Tuli Block

by

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I, Cynthia J. Moss, have studied the behavioural ecology of elephants in Africa for 30 years. I have been the Director of the Amboseli Elephant Research Project in Kenya for 26 years. My scientific research has concentrated on social organization, social relationships and demography. As part of my research I carried out a two-year intensive study of elephant calf development and behaviour and mother-calf relationships. As a recognized expert on elephants including elephant calf behaviour, I have been requested to view a video tape taken by Rick Allen, manager of the wildlife unit of South Africa's National Council of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), and make a statement about the condition and treatment of a group of calves presently held in captivity in South Africa.

It is my understanding that the Botswana Wildlife Department and the local Landowners Association granted permission to animal trader, Riccardo Ghiazza, of African Game Services in South Africa, to capture 50 elephants and to sell them to foreign buyers as trained or partially trained animals for use in zoos, circuses and for elephant-back safaris.

I am informed that in late August 1998, in the Tuli Block, 30 elephant calves reported to be between the ages of 4 and 10 years old were forcibly taken from their natal families. The families were herded with helicopters and individual calves picked out and shot with immobilizing drugs. The mother and other adults were chased away with the helicopters. The captured calves were transported to South Africa by road. They are presently being kept in a converted warehouse in Hartebeesport Dam.

On 2 September, Rick Allen of the NSPCA obtained a search warrant to view the elephants and was able to film the situation, treatment and behaviour of 13 of these elephants. I have viewed this video tape today. The following is my statement:

Capturing Live Elephant Calves

I have previously made a statement about my views on capturing live baby elephants from elephant families in the wild. I believe that the disruption and extreme distress caused to the family and the terror and trauma caused to the calf are unjustifiable on any grounds.

The Condition and Treatment of the Captive Elephant Calves

Now that I have seen the conditions under which the calves are being kept I can also make a statement on the appropriateness of their treatment in captivity.

1) In the video I could see approximately 12 calves inside a large metal building like a hanger. They were tied to metal railings in the following way. Their front legs were tied together with a "hobble" and then additionally tied to a ring in the floor. They could not move their front legs at all, backwards, forwards or sideways. Their rear legs were also in some cases hobbled and in all cases one rear leg was chained and the chain pulled tightly back and fastened to a railing behind each calf. This double chaining both front and rear resulted in the calves standing in an unnatural posture with their hind legs stretched out behind them. Standing in this way for more than a few minutes would cause pain and discomfort.

2) There is no way that these calves could lie down. All elephants, even adults, sleep lying down for some portion of a 24 hour day. Adults sleep for about 3-4 hours lying down, calves sleep lying down several times in the course of a day for anything from an half hour in the daytime to several hours at night. One calf was on its "knees" or front carpal joints, possibly due to exhaustion. I believe these calves are being sleep-deprived.

3) The calves were standing on wet concrete which was constantly being hosed down. In the video I could see that they were constantly shifting their weight from foot to foot as if their feet were causing them intense pain. I have never seen this activity in the wild. In zoos the single biggest problem that keepers have with captive elephants is with their feet, which easily get fissures and abscesses. Great care is taken in zoos to keep elephants from standing on wet hard concrete. In one scene in the video when a calf is being led back into the warehouse, its manner of walking indicates that its feet are sore.

4) On the general physical condition of the elephants, many were very thin, particularly the smaller ones without tusks who would still be suckling from their mothers. These smaller ones showed distinct signs of malnutrition. The bones on the sides of their heads below the eyes were very prominent. This is a sign that a calf is starving. Only calves who are very sick, are experiencing drought, or who have been orphaned in Amboseli are gaunt in this way. In addition the captive calves appeared to be very hungry straining at their chains to get at the pieces of food being offered. I believe the calves are being deprived of food to hasten the taming down process. I could see wounds on the legs and heads of several calves. The wounds on the head appeared to be caused by a sharp instrument. The wounds on the legs were caused by the ropes or chains. Some of the calves also had swollen legs.

5) On the psychological condition of the elephants, it is obvious to anyone who has studied elephant behavior that these individuals are severely traumatized. Everything about their postures and gestures shows they are frightened and highly disturbed. Their eyes are wide open in terror; their ears are cocked in the alert, scared position; they were still charging at the people walking by, and subsequently being disciplined by, in one scene, someone with a long pipe-like object. One calf was repeatedly violently rubbing its tusks on the railing. In another scene of training

outside, three men were involved and one adult Asian elephant. The calf was tied to the adult elephant with ropes; there was one man riding the elephant, another threatening the calf with a long stick and a third throwing bucket after bucket of water into the calf's face as it approached a water reservoir. It was difficult to understand what was being attempted. It appeared that the calf may have been trying to get to the water to drink, but as it approached it was repulsed by the buckets of water. The calf was very distressed.

CITES Regulations

1) I am aware that in 1997 the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) decided to include the Botswana population on Appendix II with an annotation to allow the export of live elephants to "appropriate and acceptable destinations." However, I do not consider their first destination in South Africa to be appropriate or acceptable because the elephant calves are being subjected to extremely harmful physical and psychological conditions and treatments. Furthermore, I do not consider their final destination, public display and use, to be appropriate or acceptable because the life of a captive elephant, with very few exceptions, is one of alternating brutality and boredom. Therefore, I do not consider the export of these elephants from Botswana to be in accordance with CITES.

2.) I am aware that, under the terms of CITES Article IV (c), the export of live specimens of Appendix II species, such as the elephants from Botswana, must be "prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment." However, after viewing the videotape of the elephants being held in South Africa, it is clear to me that these elephants have been and are being subjected to unnecessarily cruel treatment and damage to health. This means to me that the government of South Africa should not issue re-export permits for these animals because such re-export would violate CITES Article IV (c). Moreover, I consider the removal of dependent elephant calves from their family groups to be unnecessarily cruel and that this has resulted in damage to the health of the calves. Therefore, I believe the granting of the export permit by Botswana to be a violation of CITES Article IV (c).

Conclusion

I attended a 10-day workshop in India on the training and management of captive elephants. Elephant experts from all over India plus Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia attended. The training methods displayed were those developed in Assam over several centuries and involve no brutality. Only large soft ropes are used and only bamboo sticks; no chains, no hooks. With gentle treatment an elephant can be tamed down in 24 hours; with the help of trainer elephants it can learn to respond to several voice commands in four or five days. Watching the Assamese at work I could almost accept the idea of elephants in captivity. The methods I saw being employed in South Africa were in stark contrast and seemed unnecessarily brutal. These types of methods were unconditionally condemned at the meeting I attended in India.

The meeting in India took place several years ago. We've come a long way since then in our awareness of elephant cognition and social and behavioural complexity. It's no longer acceptable to say that elephants have been tamed and trained in harsh ways for centuries and therefore it is justifiable to continue to do so. It is similar to someone saying in the mid 1800s that slavery

existed for thousands of years and therefore there is no reason to abolish it. There comes a time when we have to start saying no to cruelty and injustice for intelligent animals. We fail in our own humanity when we treat animals so unkindly.