

LETTER FROM LISA KANE TO LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCIL AND MAYOR VILLARAIGOSA

Dear Mayor Villaraigosa and Council members,

I am the senior editor and a contributing author to “Best Practices for Captive Elephant Well-Being,” published by Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine’s Center for Animals and Public Policy (2009). This document resulted from years of study, travel and collaboration among zoo, science and public policy experts concerned with the future of elephants. In light of my experience and work on that project, I respectfully suggest that the pending proposal to commit \$42M for a 3.5 acre exhibit for Asian elephants at the Los Angeles Zoo does not merit your support.

Independent experts agree that elephants are physically vigorous, non-territorial animals who move almost continuously for 20 out of 24 hours (Moss 1983; Poole and Granli 2009). They range 7 to 13 miles per day (Sukumar 2003). Female Asian elephant home ranges have been measured from 34 to 800 sq. km. (22.5 sq. miles to 464 sq. miles) (Sukumar 2003; Poole and Granli 2009). Elephants’ continuous movement through large spaces is integral to their social, mental and physical health over the long arc of their lives.

Science reported in December 2008 that elephants held in zoos die almost 20 years earlier than their counterparts in the wild (Clubb, Rowcliff, Lee, Mar, Moss and Mason 2008). This shocking pattern of unnatural deaths occurs in the face of the industry’s provision of modern veterinary intervention and protection of their elephants from the ravages of drought, starvation and predation.

So what might account for this dismal state of affairs? Perhaps we should consider what zoos do not provide their elephants. Chief among the deficits is lack of space even minimally equivalent to the size or variety of spaces utilized by elephants in the wild.

Sadly, LA Zoo’s proposal continues this outdated vision. The proposed 3.5-acre exhibit will be minute compared to the space elephants utilize freely in the wild. As important, it will also be monotonous when compared to the complex, wet, lush tropical and semi-tropical forests of Asian elephants’ typical habitat.

But even though the exhibit is small and monotonous compared to Asian elephants’ habitat in wild, it will not come cheap.

In these days of devastating financial hardship, it is especially difficult to justify spending \$42M on a zoo space arguably incapable of keeping its resident alive as long as elephants in the wild who struggle on their own against drought, predation, injury and disease.

Bronx Zoo and many other fine institutions have faced this hard choice and taken a pragmatic and principled decision. I respectfully urge you to do the same.

Sincerely,
Lisa Kane, JD