

Zoos Branch
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Zone 1/14b
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6EB

Dear Zoos Branch,

I would like to express my deepest concerns with regards to the current practice of Free Contact (FC) management within a select number of zoos in the UK. I was shocked to learn that the ankus is still being used as a training tool for captive elephants at four different collections across the UK.

I am writing to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in particular, as the founder of the Elephant Welfare Group (EWG) which exists 'to ensure that elephants in the UK collections are maintained to the highest standards based on current knowledge'. Whilst I appreciate that it is not within the DEFRA's remit to recommend one elephant management system over another; numerous case studies around the world have resulted in an increased level of 'current knowledge' on the welfare of elephants trained through FC. As stated in the EWG's February 2015 newsletter referring to the debate over FC and Protected Contact (PC) management, 'open discussion is useful' and I hope my views on this topic 'which needs to be addressed' will be considered.

When trained under PC, elephants are free to exercise control over their own environment thus increasing elephant choice and willingness to, for example, participate in veterinary procedures, reducing the need for anaesthesia and crushing. Providing elephants with options and freedom of choice creates positive welfare ramifications.

Due to time constraints and lack of funding, captive elephant behaviour and welfare has been largely assessed in a 'snapshot' fashion, but this is not a justified reason to continue with a dominant management approach borne from the threat of an ankus. What we do know of elephants, as long-lived animals, is that they have incredible memories, surpassing that of many other species. Elephants remember once being threatened by an ankus and 'behave' this way through fear of physical and psychological torment. Of the 15 collections in the UK which house captive elephants, 11 have switched to PC. I am appealing to you to please revise the current FC management approach at 4 collections; Whipsnade Zoo, Colchester Zoo, West Midlands Safari Park and Woburn Safari Park, which combined totals 20 elephants, trained using an ankus.

Animal welfare must be an absolute priority at any UK zoo, however the current management approach practiced at 4 collections fail to provide hard evidence that FC results in positive welfare ramifications for captive elephants. I am calling for a review on the elephant management approach at Whipsnade Zoo, Colchester Zoo, West Midlands Safari Park and Woburn Safari Park, I would like to courteously appeal to you to please make this issue a priority.

Whilst elephants remain in captivity, it is absolutely paramount that their welfare is recognised as utmost importance. Please listen to me and people around the world calling for change and adopt a PC management approach at all zoos.

Yours sincerely,

FULL NAME

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