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Recent Correspondence

Elephant Editors

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RECENT CORRESPONDENCE

The following are responses or excerpts from responses to Elephant Number 3. They are released with permission of the writers or in accordance with a note given on page 47 of Elephant Number 3. Correspondence is presented chronologically.

4th May 1979

Dear Mr. Shoshani,

We would be interested in participation in your elephant information project*, but are unclear as to how it would operate. It is professionally unethical for us in the U.K. to publicize a special interest in elephants. Our interest and expertise has to be passed around by word of mouth, and many elephant owners in Northern Europe are in contact with us. There are no elephants which have no veterinary care, and any veterinarian in the U.K. can contact the British Veterinary Zoological Society for the name of an expert.

We are quite happy that our name be given to anyone with elephants, but the concept of publicizing "hot-line" would not be tenable in professional circles. Indeed I doubt whether it is tenable in the U.S.A.

Yours sincerely,

A.G. Greenwood MA VetMB MRCVS.
Keighley, ENGLAND

*See "Hot-line", Elephant, 1(3):53.

In a second letter dated 6th July 1979, Greenwood made further comments:

The help given to Elephant owners through the British Veterinary Zoological Society is simply to refer them to a veterinarian with expert knowledge. Obviously, he does not then do his work for free. I hardly think that elephant owners in general are unable, or unwilling, to pay normal professional fees - indeed most of them make money out of their elephants. My feeling is that your hot-line should serve a similar purpose or provide back up advice for veterinarians in difficulty. It is unreasonable . . . to publicly offer free advice direct to elephant owners in

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direct competition with veterinarians in practice. This is not the function of a "consultant".

Yours sincerely,

A.G. Greenwood, MA VetMB MIBiol MRCVS.

14th May '79

Dear Sir,

Your article "Elephant Myths, Legends and Folklore"* had appeared in "Compassionate Friend" of April '79, a copy of which was mailed to you. A correspondent has written to us:

"In the article "Elephant Myths, Legends and Folklore in your April '79 issue, Mr. Jeheskel Shoshani has placed the Dream of Queen Maya in 185-72 B.C. This is not correct. All authorities on the subject agree that the Budha lived during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. 2500 years of his birth was celebrated throughout the world a few years back."

We expect the informations supplied by a magazine like "Compassionate Friend" to be correct."

This is for your information.

Yours faithfully,

(S.M. Masani)

Editor, "Compassionate Friend:

*The article which appeared in "Compassionate Friend" was the section "Myths, Legends and Folklore" excerpted from "General information on elephants with emphasis on tusks". See Elephant, 1(2):20-31.

Our response follows:

August 20, 1980

Mr. S.M. Masani
Editor, Compassionate Friend
Beauty without Cruelty
4 Prince of Wale's Drive
Wanowrie, Poona 411 001
INDIA

Dear Mr. Masani:

I regret that so much time has passed since your letter of 14th May '79 arrived in the Elephant Interest Group office. Your reader's comment about the Dream of Queen Maya led to a thorough investigation. We were assisted by staff from the Folklore Archives at Wayne State University's Purdy Library.

Mrs. Janet Langlois and Ms. Deborah Weisenthal at the Archives attempted to find a date associated with this legend but were unable to trace its origin. Their conclusion, and ours, has been that the date of 185-72 B.C. which appears on pages 77-93 in Rowland B. 1967 (The Art and Architecture of India: Buddhist/Hindu/Jain. Penguin Books, Ltd., Baltimore, 512 pp.) is probably the first recorded date with which we can associate the Dream of Queen Maya. The Dream of Queen Maya is depicted on the red sandstone pillar medallion on the railing of Stupa Number 2 from Bharhut, Shunga Period, early 1st Century B.C. This railing is now at the Indian Museum, Calcutta. Undoubtedly, the legend was part of an oral tradition for several centuries beforehand.

Should your reader have additional comments and/or information to the above, kindly forward them to us. Thank you for your understanding and patience.

Sincerely yours,

Jeheskel (Hezy) Snoshani
Editor, Elephant

JS/sl

cc: Janet Langlois
Deborah Weisenthal

June 24, 1979

Dear Mr. Shoshani,

. . . We have long been interested in elephants, both in zoos and in circuses. We agree with Mr. Richard J. Reynolds that circus elephant handlers and trainers should be included in your interest group. Many of these people are not scientifically oriented, but they have vast experience and knowledge of the behavior and care of captive elephants. They are keenly interested in the preservation of both species in the wild as well as in captivity

We're all painfully aware that the breeding of elephants in zoos is rare. It would be interesting to know how many male elephants are owned by circuses and private parties.* It seems that zoo directors are fearful of handling males, due to the myth that they are unmanageable. On the contrary, circus people seem to have more trouble with females.

It's our opinion that the people working with elephants should have control over their charges, but in most zoos the reverse is true. The captive propagation of elephants might be more easily accomplished if zoo elephants were better trained and zoo personnel were trained to handle them. The trick is in getting the right person to do the training. Unfortunately, most zoos are unwilling to make the expenditure, both of money and time. Hence, the lack of captive-bred elephants and the surplus of injured elephant keepers.

We seldom see surveys with any mentions of elephants in Mexico. There is a large population of circus and zoo elephants there, including many Asian males. In the second "Elephant Newsletter" there is a mention of elephants suffering damage to their trunks and subsequent dying from such injuries. About 10 years ago, in Bloomington, California, a young male elephant lost two thirds of its trunk to a tiger through human error. This elephant is now owned by a Mexican zoo, and to the best of our knowledge,

*See "CAPTIVE ELEPHANT POPULATION OF NORTH AMERICA: 1980 UPDATE" in this issue for known numbers of male and female elephants in zoos.

has been managing quite well all these years. It might be worthwhile to trace the ownership of this elephant to find out how the injury and its handicap have been overcome.** We are connected to both the zoo and circus "elephant grapevine," and hopefully we can provide some useful information regarding captive elephants. . . .

Sincerely,

Bob Kellogg and Susie Kasielke
Pasadena, California, USA

**In a subsequent letter (May 6, 1980) Kellogg and Kasielke provided us with the following information: "The elephant you inquired about, formerly known as 'Sammy' and nicknamed 'Trunkless,' is now owned by the African Safari, Valsequillo, Mexico. The man in charge there is Jose Luis Pena Camacho, should you wish to contact him." A letter has been written (May 27, 1980) to Mr. Pena asking him to provide us with a detailed account. No reply as of this date.

February 17, 1980

Dear Hezy,

. . . . Keep up the good work. In particular I appreciate your list of elephant references. It is impossible for me to keep up with the literature over here and so your bibliography is of great value to me

Best regards,

Cynthia Moss
Nairobi, KENYA

April 16, 1980

Dear Colleague Hezy Shoshani:*

I am delighted by your monumental activities in the name of flourishing elephants. Organizing and listing elephant experts, publishing of vital news, composition of broad bibliography, all these quite noble goals and purposes.

*Translated from Russian by William Prychodko.

. . . . Unfortunately I do not know how can I help you in a constructive way in the activities, since I am working with extinct elephants

With respect,

N.K. Vereshchagin
Leningrad, U.S.S.R.

March 5, 1980

Dear Ms. Lash,

I was absolutely fascinated by your letter of 27th December 1979

Yes, I found gall stones in the bile ducts of several African elephants during my research on the species 1963-67. I think I still possess the bile stones and bile gravel in formalin in sealed bags stored away "in the depth" of our store here at home. The diameter of the largest bile stone, at the time of necropsy on the elephant cow in whose liver, it occurred, was 7.5 cm. In each case where stones or bile gravel occurred, the liver was larger than normal, and heavier, for the size of the elephant. Is there any way of analyzing the supposed gall stone from your mammoth?

I have just written to Hezy Shoshani to say that I have quite a lot of material from elephants and manatees used in my research, preserved in formalin in sealed bags. I am willing to sell these to anyone who can use these and who will pay for packaging and transport. If any interest is shown, I will make time to dig these out of store - among them the gall stones would emerge.

I did have a simple clinical medical test done on the gall stones and their composition was found to be roughly comparable to human ones. Just checking up my field notes, I see that I took "2 lb 8 oz gall stones" from specimen M88, the elephant with the 7.5 cm stone. I should not consider it at all surprising if it is found that mammoths, as well as African elephants, experienced gall stones, cardiovascular diseases, and parasitic infestations - especially in circumstances of overpopulation, boredom, stress, etc.!

Write again if you've got any more questions or want the bag of M88's gallstones.

All best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia K. Sikes
Newbury, Yorkshire, ENGLAND

March 5, 1980

Dear Mr. Shoshani,

Thank you for your letter and enclosures. I was not aware of "Elephant" newsletters and shall be glad to receive nos. 1 and 2, and no. 4 when it appears.

I am no longer engaged in wildlife studies as I left Africa in 1977 and am now living in England. I still have some material from Trichechus senegalensis in formalin here with me but have little opportunity these days to work on it(See Sikes, Sylvia K. under "Available".)

I find the subject of your Ph.D. dissertation fascinating and I hope that I shall be able to buy a copy of the work when published.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia K. Sikes

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25th June 1980

Dear Sir,

CAPTIVE BREEDING OF ASIAN ELEPHANTS

I wish to draw attention of your readership to a problem with which I am being increasingly confronted and which concerns the usefulness of domestic Asian Elephants to man. All of us faced with this problem would very much appreciate any advice or help, particularly in bringing about a collaboration of efforts in the international conservation and zoo worlds for its solution.

Enthusiasts are no doubt well aware that for centuries captive Asian Elephants have played very important economic and cultural roles on this continent. These roles are by no means diminished in importance today. They are probably also aware that, despite this, there has been no real development of a captive breeding capability in the region. Indeed for the most part this has been actively discouraged, and for good economic reasons. This approach was tenable so long as there was an ample resource of wild elephants from which to recruit new additions to the tame population directly. Now that this is manifestly no longer the case, several Asian governments are placing considerable emphasis on the need to become "self-sufficient" in domesticated elephants.

For example, in Nepal, elephants are important in the forestry, tourism and cultural sectors. However, with the country's wild population down to a dozen or less, there is no question of exploiting it, especially as this would be insufficient to meet projected needs anyhow. In recent years the Nepalese have bought tame elephants from India, but this is becoming increasingly difficult (through controls) and expensive. The Nepalese Govt. therefore want to achieve a captive breeding capability, and I have been asked to obtain international advice and assistance in this regard. In Burma, where the entire teak industry is based on log extraction by some 2,600 working elephants, it is not surprising to learn that the State Timber Corporation is planning an improved captive-elephant management program, which amongst other objectives, aims "to improve standards of nutrition, captive breeding, and working." IUCN/WWF are currently trying to promote World Bank assistance for this program, but this is far from assured. (See article entitled "The importance of elephants in Burmese forestry: a proposal for World Bank support in this issue.)

In Sri Lanka, whilst the captive population has become depleted, the country faces the probability of considerable enforced recruitment to the tame population by the displacement of wild elephants consequent to accelerated development programs. Ecological considerations may not permit all elephants captured from problem areas to be reintroduced into the safety of wildlife preserves.

Nevertheless, however great this "forced" recruitment to the tame population, these animals are viewed by the Government, from the Cabinet downwards, as a valued and cherished national resource not to be squandered. The directive has come therefore that existing and future so-called "orphan" or displaced elephants should form the

basis for a progressive captive breeding and rearing program. Once this is successfully established, it is envisaged that any animals surplus to national requirements may, under strict regulation, be available for export so that the center may earn towards its own upkeep to a certain extent.

The Department of Wildlife Conservation already possesses 12 animals to form a breeding nucleus, and the Government has already provided a 500 acre property on which to develop a special Captive Breeding Center. It is hoped that research will be carried out at the Center to elucidate breeding biology and to acquire data which are difficult to obtain in the field but have relevance there.

The immediate need is for funds to implement the infrastructural development required for the Center. The sum involved is roughly \$30,000. I have been asked to solicit international assistance on behalf of the Government for their captive breeding program as a matter of the very highest priority.

Unfortunately, we are unable to consider assistance from our limited IUCN/WWF Elephant Funds in such cases, as the priority allocations therefrom are from conservation of wild elephant populations, and our resources are already insufficient in this regard.

As the affairs of the SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group are also more concerned with wild populations, I am taking this opportunity to refer these matters to your specialist readership. In particular it is my hope they they might give a very high priority to seeking financial assistance through their various contacts (particularly with the zoo world), for creating Sri Lanka's Captive Breeding Center, which promises to become one of the world's leading establishments of its kind and therefore a source of advice and data of considerable use and value to other countries in the region wishing to improve their success in breeding elephants in captivity (e.g. Nepal, Burma, India etc.).

In return for financial assistance from foreign institutions, I expect the Sri Lankan Government would offer members of those institutions the opportunity to conduct appropriate and relevant research on a collaborative basis both on captive and wild elephants, provided activities are properly authorized in advance and that subsequently all results and their implications are properly disseminated.

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Interested parties are invited to correspond with me on this matter at the following address:

IUCN/WWF ASIAN ELEPHANT CO-ORDINATING CENTRE,
16, de Saram Road,
Mount Lavinia,
Sri Lanka

Yours faithfully,

Robert C.D. Olivier
Deputy Chairman, SSC Asian Elephant Group and
Regional Co-ordinator (Asia), IUCN/WWF
Elephant Survey and Conservation Programme.

In connection with breeding of elephants, Barbara Tata (Seagoville, Texas, USA) in her letter of August 20, 1980, sent us the following information as provided to her by W.G. Paull, D.V.M.: "The sperm count on this elephant ("Buke," an Asian elephant owned by Tata and Bucky Steele) is excellent - more than 95% live sperm with less than 1% abnormal. The count of 179,000,000/ml is a good count for horses and I think this would be the same for an elephant. The longevity of the sperm seemed to be very good at room temperature. In my opinion the breeding ability and semen is very adequate."

Readers are encouraged to write and express their opinions or add information on any issue presented in Elephant. We assume that the contents of letters sent to us are to be shared by our readers, unless stated otherwise.