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# Items passed through elephants' digestive systems and a warning

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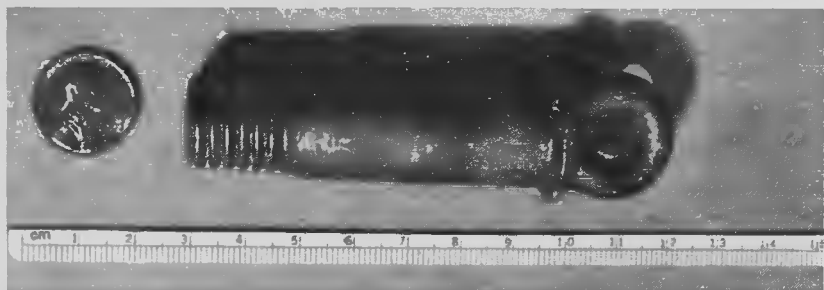
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**Items passed through elephants' digestive systems and a warning**  
compiled by Jeheskel Shoshani — Elephant Research Foundation

Much of what an elephant eats (66%), goes through its digestive system undigested (Benedict, 1936, p. 291). Benedict fed his elephant, "Jap", pieces of inner tube inside bread. When examining for pieces of rubber in her feces, he found that only some had teeth marks. The rest passed through her huge molars untouched. Sever (1982) documents whole oranges passing through elephant digestive systems intact. Elephants in the same captive herd would wait for elephants to defecate and would then insert their trunks up the anus of the defecating elephant to retrieve and eat the oranges. The case reported here is not uncommon. "Karaunda", a female Asian elephant, swallowed the bolt figured on next page and eliminated it about one week later. It measures 9.0 cm (~4 inches) long, 2.0 cm (~1 inch) in diameter, and weighs 160 grams (5.7 ounces). This bolt was given to J. Shoshani by the late Mr. Axel Gauthier (elephant trainer with Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus=RBBBC), October 15, 1982, when RBBBC was performing at the Joe Louis Arena in Detroit, Michigan. Karaunda once swallowed a small transistor radio "like it was an apple." Other cases of animals swallowing what to us are inedible items were reported by Hanks (1979, figure on p. 35; same picture appears in Spinage, 1994, p.

168), on wild elephants. “Jumbo”, the most famous captive elephant, swallowed unusual items [see photograph by “Sabu” in Elephant 2(2), p. 114]. We take this opportunity to inform elephant owners and visitors to be cautious as to what they let elephants get their trunks on, and be aware of the necessity of preventing elephants from swallowing indigestible matter. One never knows what chemical reaction may take place in the digestive tract and consequent impact on the health of elephants. Examples related illustrate the problem. Many elephants that died prematurely were not examined for items in their digestive systems, so we do not know if inedible ingested items affected their health or hastened their deaths.



A photograph of a bolt, weighing 160 grams (5.7 ounces) which passed through the digestive system of “Karaunda”, a female Asian elephant, and was eliminated about one week later [photo credit: J. Shoshani].

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