



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

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In Defense of Animals Blasts Pittsburgh Zoo For Import Of Elephant Calf
Group says zoo reinforces reckless breeding practices, separation of calves from mothers

San Rafael, Calif. (August 22, 2011) – In Defense of Animals (IDA) is criticizing the Pittsburgh Zoo for importing a five-year-old male African calf named Thabo-Umasai from the Dresden Zoo in Germany. The organization says that the calf’s story illustrates the suffering caused to elephants by harmful zoo practices.

“The Pittsburgh Zoo should be ashamed,” said IDA Elephant Campaign Director Catherine Doyle. “Taking this calf from the Dresden Zoo only reinforces the reckless breeding and handling practices prevalent in so many zoos, including the forced separations of mothers and calves.”

Thabo-Umasai was the first calf conceived via artificial insemination in Germany and the first to be born at the Dresden Zoo, though the zoo was well aware it did not have the facilities to keep male offspring and that artificial inseminations tend to produce more males.

The calf stayed with his mother until March 2010, when he severely injured a keeper. Then only four years old, Thabo-Umasai was separated from his mother and the other females that had nurtured him since birth. Disregarding the trauma caused by this artificial separation, the zoo immediately announced plans to send the calf to the Pittsburgh Zoo.

Free-ranging elephants naturally live in tight-knit family groups in which females remain together for life; males leave the herd at puberty, about age 14. In contrast, zoos will remove offspring from their mothers at as young as three years causing profound distress to mother and calf. One scientific study found that Asian elephants separated from their mothers did not survive as well as those who remained with them.

“The importation of this elephant calf is another tragic example of why elephants should not be held in zoos,” said Doyle. “Despite the overwhelming evidence that separating mothers and calves is highly stressful and causes physical and psychological harm, zoos continue this cruel practice.”

Questions remain about whether Thabo-Umasai will stay at the Pittsburgh Zoo, as recent news reports claim the calf will be sent to the Birmingham Zoo in Alabama.

For more information, please visit www.HelpElephants.com.

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In Defense of Animals is an international animal protection organization located in San Rafael, Calif., dedicated to protecting animals’ rights, welfare, and habitat through education, outreach, and our hands-on rescue facilities in Mumbai, India, Cameroon, Africa, and rural Mississippi.