

Dr. Mel Richardson, Veterinarian

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Dr. Manalastas:

During my visit in May of this year to the Manila Zoo, I had the opportunity to examine Mali and make some recommendations that were based on my more than 42 years caring for captive wild animals, including almost 100 elephants. In the time that has passed since my examination, it appears that little has been done to address the serious concerns that I brought to the attention of the zoo staff. In fact, Mali's condition seems to have worsened. Mali's keeping staff, including volunteer John Chua, while being well-meaning individuals who express a sincere love for Mali, demonstrates to me their lack of anything but superficial knowledge of basic elephant husbandry. Mali's current physical condition and present circumstances at the Manila Zoo are placing her in grave danger, and for all intents and purposes are putting her life in jeopardy. To put it simply: Mali may die from the lack of care she is receiving if left at the zoo. The following observations may seem overly harsh and judgmental, but I am greatly concerned for the welfare of Mali. All of the information that I am receiving forces me to draw the conclusion that the management of the zoo and the politicians of Manila and/or the Philippines are more interested in keeping Mali in the Philippines no matter how much she suffers, even if it kills her.

Over the last few weeks I have had the opportunity to review many recent videos of Mali at length. I noticed that she is more overweight now than when I visited in May. Her obesity is compounding the severity of the arthritis and foot disease that she appears to be suffering from. There are videos of her at rest in her bedroom, as well as moving around in her outside enclosure. These videos include close-up views of Mali's feet and nails. I see that certain cosmetic changes have been made in the appearance of her feet, in that her overlong and over grown cuticles have been trimmed back to a more acceptable level, Mali still urgently needs proper foot care from a trained professional. The changes that have been made have done little to alleviate any pain and discomfort. I am more concerned than ever that Mali's care, as well as the safety of the Manila Zoo personnel, is in very real jeopardy. Allowing inexperienced caretakers and volunteers to perform any amount of foot care, is contributing to Mali's suffering, not alleviating it.

These changes made by untrained personnel can be likened to finding a gunshot wound in an animal and only treating the entry wound without removing the bullet. The animal may look better, but they will still be in pain and their health will still be in considerable danger until the bullet is removed. Only a

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trained veterinarian can distinguish between a superficial wound and a more serious threat. Abscesses and infected fistulas (tracts of infection seeking a way out of the body) are common in elephants who have had their foot care neglected for as many years as Mali has.

One of the videos I was provided with shows Mali sleeping while leaning against a wall. This video is especially disturbing. She is clearly tired and trying to get comfortable by pressing her right backside into the corner against the wall. While holding her left forelimb off of the ground, pointing it downward, she redistributes her weight onto her right forelimb and toward her rear legs and butt pressed against the wall. This explains the sores I have seen on her hips, which seem to be pressure points over the hip bones. On all of the videos I have reviewed, Mali favors or removes the weight from primarily her left forelimb, regularly when standing in one place. Occasionally she does favor the right as well, alternating with the left. I am absolutely certain Mali has pain in her front limbs and feet. Elephants carry the majority of their weight on their front legs and so it is expected that elephants living in ill-conceived, unimaginative, and abusive environments like Mali's at the Manila Zoo would suffer the most in their front end.

My greatest concern having watched Mali trying to sleep and/or rest while leaning against a wall, is that she is not lying down at least 4 hours out of every 24 hours. In their natural state, I mean in the wild, elephants lie down not so much to sleep but to rest their joints and feet, allowing the blood circulation to carry healing oxygen to the tissues of the feet. In my experience, when elephants like Mali stop lying down to rest and start leaning against walls, it is only a matter of time before she lies down or falls down and is unable to get back up. I fear this is the fate for Mali if she is not moved to sanctuary soon. If I am mistaken and Mali is lying down and resting for 4 hours every day, then please share the video evidence of this with me.

Lying down every day becomes especially important to elephants like Mali who are forced to live on unyielding concrete. The videos demonstrate Mali's abnormally smooth foot pads. This is just another factor causing her pain and suffering that the Manila Zoo with inexperienced staff and meager resources seems unable to solve.

In one of the close ups of Mali's feet, I observed the barrier in Mali's cage had several rusted and broken bars leaving sharp edges. I have been told that Mali was recently seen to have a cut or scratch on her trunk. This just goes to show that the level of disrepair of Mali's habitat is not a recent phenomenon, but is apparently institutionalized in the Manila Zoo. I would urge all those concerned with sending Mali to Boon Lott's Elephant Sanctuary in Thailand to visit the facility and see for yourself just what this facility can offer Mali.

I have read that you, Dr. Manalastas, have stated that you cannot support moving Mali since PETA cannot guarantee, 100%, that she will survive the trip. I can say that if Mali is moved by experienced elephant experts (which is PETA's plan), the chances of her not surviving the trip are negligible. In 1982, I was involved in the air transport of 44 young African elephants from Zimbabwe to Dallas, TX, with 100% survival. Since that time, I have seen or assisted with numerous elephant moves and I have had 100% success. The last was traveling with Maggie, a 27 year old female from the Anchorage Zoo in

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Alaska. We flew her to California in 2007 and she is now happy and healthy with other African elephants. As you and I both know, there are no 100 percents when dealing with animals. I can state that if Mali is left at the Manila Zoo that she will continue to physically suffer and be lonely with 100% certainty. And sentencing an elephant to live alone is the cruelest abuse of all.

I urge you Dr. Manalastas to consider Mali's perspective. She deserves to spend the remainder of her life with elephants, elephants that will spend 24 hours a day with her every day, unlike her human handlers. As you know people all over the world are concerned with Mali's care and support her move to a sanctuary. I'm sure you realize that this negative publicity is tarnishing the reputation of both the zoo and the entire country.

Looking forward to your response;



Henry M. Richardson, DVM

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