



EAZA Executive Office

Mrs Myfanwy Griffith
c/o Artis Zoo - Amsterdam
PO Box 20164
1000 HD Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Pro Wildlife e.V. · Engelhardstr. 10 · D-81369 München

6 June 2019

Dear Mrs Griffith,

The undersigned organisations are contacting you regarding the elephant management techniques used at EAZA member institutions. We appeal to EAZA to revise its guidelines by banning the use of bullhooks and making Protected Contact systems mandatory as soon as possible, to ensure the welfare and safety of both keepers and elephants.

Elephant management in Free Contact implies a high level of domination and coercion, usually involving the use of the bullhook on particularly sensitive areas of the body. While the bullhook is frequently referred to as a “guide”, this method of handling elephants relies on negative reinforcement of painful or aversive stimuli. It risks disruption to elephants’ social structure and can result in injury and psychological stress. In addition to causing harm to elephants, Free Contact places keepers at risk, with a large number of injuries and even fatal attacks by elephants documented.

Nevertheless, many EAZA member zoos continue to manage elephants in Free Contact, with evidence documenting abusive utilization of the ankus at some of them¹. Alternative systems employing Protected Contact would greatly improve the welfare of elephants in captivity and also ensure the safety of keepers. Evidence from several institutions shows that alteration of facilities for Protected Contact, such as installation of sliding gates for manual use, can be implemented at comparatively low costs and within a short period of time.

Following a series of incidents, the AZA (Association of Zoos & Aquariums) in 2011 adopted [a policy](#) for elephant care, requiring all AZA-accredited zoos from 2014 onwards to ensure that elephant handlers do not use the same unrestricted space with elephants. Limited exceptions include incidents such as medical emergencies or birth management. This move should serve as a model for the long overdue change to Protected Contact in European zoos.

An additional concern from an animal welfare as well as a safety perspective is the use of elephants for shows and similar events at EAZA member institutions. The “[EAZA Guidelines on the use of animals in public demonstrations](#)” published in 2018 disapprove the unrestricted physical contact between humans and animals for the purpose of entertainment. However, evidence from some EAZA member institutions documents, how elephants are made to participate in performances or events with visitors. In some cases, visitors have for example been permitted to ride elephants, accompany

¹ <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/04/wildlife-watch-hannover-zoo-elephant-bullhook/>

them for walks or have their photos taken with elephants. Such use of elephants seems to violate the EAZA guidelines and is putting zoo visitors at risk. Therefore, we ask you to establish a clear policy banning direct contact to visitors and enforce standards accordingly in future.

Using dominance and coercion to handle wild animals and using them for entertainment purposes should be unacceptable practices for modern day European zoos. Furthermore, it sends an inappropriate message to zoo visitors, who expect the animals at EAZA accredited facilities to be kept at high standards and treated respectfully.

The undersigned organisations therefore urge EAZA to make management of elephants in Protected Contact mandatory for all member institutions within a short period of time, ban the use of the ankus and end the direct contact between humans and animals for entertainment purposes.

Yours sincerely,



Andrea Höppner, Chair of the Board, **Pro Wildlife**

Dave Neale, Welfare Director, **Animals Asia**

Jan Creamer, President, **Animal Defenders International**

Laura Zodrow, Chair of the Board, **Animal Public**

Ian Redmond, Founder, **African Ele-Fund**

Dr. Chris Draper, Head of Animal Welfare & Captivity, **Born Free Foundation**

Karsten Plücker, Chair of the Board, **Bund gegen Missbrauch der Tiere**

Chris Fegan, Director, **Catholic Concern for Animals**

Thomas Schröder, President, **Deutscher Tierschutzbund**

Brett Mitchell, Chairman, **Elephant Reintegration Trust**

Dr. Joyce Poole, Scientific Director, and Petter Granli, President & Executive Director, **ElephantVoices**

Marion Garai, Chairperson, **Elephant Specialist Advisory Group – ESAG**

Michele Pickover, Director, **EMS Foundation**

Ilaria Di Silvestre, Wildlife Programme Leader, **Eurogroup for Animals**

Elodie Gerome-Delgado, Programme Leader Wildlife Worldwide, **Fondation Brigitte Bardot**

Vera Weber, President and CEO, **Fondation Franz Weber**

Heike Henderson, Board Member, **Future for Elephants**

Stefania Falcon, Founder, **Future 4 Wildlife**

Ruud Tombrock, Executive Director, **Humane Society International EU**

Nicole Paquette, Vice President, Wildlife Protection, **Humane Society of the United States**

Miriam Martinez, Head of Wild and Farm Animals Department, **InfoZoos**

Karen Trendler, Manager Wildlife Trade and Trafficking, **National Council of SPCA's South Africa (NSPCA)**

Bob Elliot, Director, **OneKind**

Harald Ullmann, Board of Directors, **PETA Deutschland e.V.**

Adam Grogan, Head of Wildlife, **RSPCA**

Robert Brandford, Executive Director, **Sheldrick Wildlife Trust**

Alexia Abnett, Director, **Southern African Fight for Rhinos (SAFFR)**

Dave Du Toit, **Vervet Monkey Foundation**

Michele Pickover, Coordinator, **WAPFSA**

Dr. Jan Schmidt-Burbach, Global Wildlife and Veterinary Advisor, **World Animal Protection**

Cc: Elephant TAG Chair Dr. Thomas Kölpin