

In response to **Wandering Wanda: Where next?**

Elephants are migratory by nature, walking 30-50 miles every day of the year. Nature has designed their bodies and minds to require continual exercise in order to maintain optimum health. A sanctuary philosophy is one of restoring an animal to sound health, both body and mind. This is accomplished in part by providing a vast, natural space in which the animals can exercise their true nature to walk, to forage and to interact with others of their species. The practice of providing this type of healthy environment in which elephants can recover from emotional and physical trauma is a progressive system of elephant management not yet embraced by many zoos.

The fear that sanctuaries are unhealthy for arthritic elephants is irrational. Case studies point to increased exercise resulting in improved circulation and joint flexibility in elephants living in an environment with the freedom to roam in a vast space at will. Considering what is known about arthritis, it is illogical to suggest that a cold climate and hard surfaces are not detrimental to an animal suffering from the disease. Years of research documents that elephants restricted to a small space, on hard surfaces, in cold climates suffer from debilitating and life-threatening diseases. These same diseases are not manifested in the wild or in a true sanctuary setting. Additionally, elephants with arthritis and joint stiffness show signs of improvement when placed in a sanctuary setting. The suggestion that since some elephants breed in northern climates somehow suggests that cold climates are not bad for an arthritic elephant has no logic. Populations continue to breed even in the most deprived environments, sometimes even more since there is no other natural activity afforded them.

The claim that sanctuaries have a lower level of husbandry is unsubstantiated and disputable. In fact, the Association of Sanctuary's Guidelines for elephants far exceeds AZA current guidelines. The two elephant sanctuaries in question have hundreds of acres set aside exclusively for elephants, but space is only one component of care. Both sanctuaries have access to professional veterinarians experienced in the care and treatment of elephants as well as qualified staff dedicated to a holistic approach to animal care.

The perception that "sanctuaries in general have more of a practice of letting the animals out and letting them be" is precisely accurate. Where zoos exist to ensure that animals are on exhibit for human observation, sanctuaries exist solely for the welfare of the animals in their care.

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