

Affidavit Concerning the Capture and Treatment of Elephant Calves

By

Joyce H. Poole, Ph.D.

I, Joyce H. Poole, have worked in Kenya as an elephant behavioural biologist, manager and conservationist for a period of twenty-two years. I studied elephant social behaviour and communication in Amboseli National Park over a period of fourteen years, receiving a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in 1983 and continuing my elephant studies as a postdoctoral research fellow of Princeton University. For shorter periods I have also monitored the behaviour of elephants in Tsavo National Park, Laikipia District, and Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, and Queen Elizabeth National Park in Uganda. In the early 1990s I was, for four years, coordinator of the Elephant Programme at Kenya Wildlife Service, and responsible for setting and implementing elephant management, conservation and research policy for Kenya. My current research involves elephant communication and cognition in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya. It is against this considerable experience with elephants that I have been requested to view a video tape taken by Rick Allen, manager of the wildlife unit of South Africa's National Council of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), and to make a statement regarding alleged cruelty to elephants.

Background

It is my understanding that the Botswana Wildlife Department and the local Landowners Association granted permission to animal trader, Riccardo Ghiazza, to capture 50 elephants in the Tuli Block and to sell them to foreign buyers. The elephants are destined for zoos and circuses in Germany and Switzerland, a "Safari Park" in China, as well as to elephant-back safari ventures.

I am informed that, in late August 1998, in the Tuli Block, Botswana, 30 elephants between the ages of four and ten years old were forcibly taken away from their mothers and families. Youngsters were immobilised and the adults were chased away with helicopters. The captured babies were then transferred by road to South Africa to a converted warehouse in Hartebeesport Dam where they are currently still being held. It is reported that when the elephants were first brought to their holding area they were trembling and screaming. Ghiazza intends to capture another 20 elephants calves.

On 2 September Rick Allen of the NSPCA obtained a search warrant to view the elephants and was able to film the situation, the treatment and the behaviour of 13 of these elephants.

I have now viewed the videotape and will comment on the aspects of the capture and treatment of the elephants that are in my judgement cruel. The word cruel is defined in the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as: 1. Disposed to give pain to others; inhuman; merciless 2. Causing, or fitted to cause, pain or grief. Has the capture, holding and training of the elephants caused cruelty as defined?

The Capture

1. It is my understanding that elephant families in the Tuli Block, Botswana were chased by helicopter, that young elephants between the ages of approximately four and ten years old were separated out, darted and transported from there to a holding area in Hartebeespoort Dam, South Africa.

Every elephant calf is biologically extremely important to its mother because she must invest so much time, energy and effort in producing and rearing a calf to adulthood: 22 months of gestation, four years of lactation, at least 12 years of rearing and protection. Elephants have, therefore, evolved extraordinarily developed behaviours of caring and bonding with their calves. If a calf is to survive to adulthood it, too, must form intense close bonds with its mother and other family members.

Herding elephant families by helicopter, separating out the calves, darting them and then constraining and transporting them would be highly stressful for both the calves and the families they leave behind. To violently tear a family apart by capturing live calves would cause immediate and long-term suffering. It is cruel and should not be condoned on any grounds. To argue, as some have, that this is a "mercy mission" because these individuals will be culled eventually does not in any way justify the level of cruelty involved.

The training, treatment and behaviour of the elephants: the video

1. The video begins with a training session outside the converted warehouse. It consists of three mahouts, an Asian training elephant, and a calf under the age of four years. One mahout rides the Asian elephant, while the baby, roped tightly to her side, hobbles beside her, three legs chained. The calf lunges repeatedly at a second mahout who threatens it

with a long stick. A third mahout tosses bucket after bucket of water on to the calf's head. The repeated pouring of water is one of many tactics used during the course of the video to try to break the elephants' spirits. Among humans this type of treatment is called torture.

2. The next scene moves inside the converted warehouse where the other calves are chained up. The first thing that struck me was the environment the calves have been placed in: for an elephant, or any wild creature, it is an extremely alien "unfriendly" environment of concrete and metal, and extremely loud, echoing and unfamiliar sounds. This experience in itself would be very frightening to a recently captured young elephant. Unless the purpose is to break the elephants' this type of housing is unnecessary, and it is most definitely cruel.
3. The elephants are chained by their ankles to the ground side by side but several meters apart and unable to touch one another. Elephants are extremely tactile animals and among their families they receive frequent comfort and reassurance through touch. This is especially true of youngsters under the age of five who are reassured through gentle touching (especially around the mouth, temporal glands and genitals) by older elephants whenever they are alarmed, afraid or in pain. In the wild all distress calls by young elephants receive immediate reassurance by older elephants who rush to their sides calling with a "reassurance rumble" and touching them gently. Chaining frightened young elephants out of physical contact with others from whom they could receive some reassurance is inhumane.
4. I had been informed that the elephants being held are between the ages of four and ten years old. The video, however, shows no elephants over the age of five years and several under the age of four. Most of the individuals pictured on the video would still have been receiving some nourishment from their mothers at the time of their capture. I saw no indication that these babies were receiving a milk supplement to their diet. Again, forcibly removing very young elephants from their mothers is undeniably cruel.
5. Many of the calves are clearly hungry and some are very thirsty. The calves only have access to a little bit of dry hay, and they appear to be desperate to reach the tiny morsels that their captives occasionally hand to them. One calf is given water out of a hose and the frantic manner in which it drinks suggests that it has not had access to water for a considerable time. It appears that one of the tactics used to "break" the elephants and

force them to accept their captors is the withholding of food and possibly water. Again, this treatment is unnecessary and cruel.

6. The elephants' front legs are chained together in such a way that they are unable to separate their legs more than a few inches. One front leg and one hind leg are also chained to the ground so that almost no movement is allowed. Free ranging young elephants spend between 5 and 7 hours per 24 hours sleeping. They sleep lying down next to their mothers, not standing up. These young elephants cannot lie down. One form of human torture is sleep deprivation. Depriving young elephants of sleep and rest is clearly meant to cause them grief and pain. Again, this treatment is totally unnecessary, and is purposefully cruel and inhuman.
7. Some of the scenes captured by the cameraman depict the long line of elephants from an oblique angle. In each of these the posture of the elephants is remarkable. The elephants' hind legs are not perpendicular to the ground, as they should be, but stretched out behind them: they have been chained with their front and hind legs too far apart. This is undoubtedly causing the elephants to suffer and it seems intended to do so.
8. The calves are obviously exhausted. All of them shift their weight from one hind leg to the other every few seconds in a pattern and frequency not observed in the wild. Free ranging elephants shift the balance of their weight much less frequently and in a very different manner. These youngsters are unable to move properly and, as a result, they are in pain. The soles of some of the elephants' feet appear to be swollen.
9. All of the calves show considerable signs of distress and trauma. None of the elephants depicted on the video stand in a relaxed posture. All elephants carry their ears raised and spread in an alert position, all elephants are exuding temporal gland secretion (a sign in this context of stress), and the eyes of many are wide (a sign of fear). The faces of the younger calves, in particular, show signs of deep trauma: their eyes are sunken as is the area around their cheekbones; their faces are significantly darker in colour than they should be and their skin has a dull appearance. These are all signs I regularly observe in orphaned calves, those malnourished or close to death.
10. I saw grief in the faces of the elephants. While this is difficult to define or describe, those of us familiar with calves who have been orphaned or mother's who have lost their calves, do recognise this very familiar expression.

11. I am informed that during the transport of the calves and later at the holding ground the young elephants trembled and screamed loudly and frequently with an intense “distress call”. Although the background noise level at the holding ground was very high and the video’s microphone badly distorted the sounds, I was able to discern at least two such distress calls. When young elephants are afraid, traumatised or hurt they scream loudly with a variety of different calls. These calls follow a gradation, increasing in sound pressure level and frequency modulation with the level of trauma. Intense distress calls elicit dramatic responses not only by family members but also by non-family members. The fact that the elephants screamed repeatedly is direct evidence that they were suffering and extremely traumatised.

12. I have been informed that Indonesian mahouts using sjamboks and crude hooks are beating the elephants. The fact that the elephants have been beaten is obvious from the numerous wounds on the elephants’ bodies. Some of these wounds look as if they have been made with a sharp and heavy object and are swollen and oozing pus. Many of the wounds are in the classic “battered elephant” location: around the eyes and the forehead. One very young elephant had several dark round patches above and behind his eyes, and next to a suppurating wound. These dark patches are likely to be gentian violet concealing yet other wounds. The film later depicted a table with numerous bottles of antiseptic ointments and gentian violet that were being used to treat the elephants.

13. Several of the elephants also have open, swollen and pussy wounds that are clearly caused by the chains around their ankles.

CITES

In addition I wish to state that the capture, transport and treatment of the elephants is not in accordance with the regulations of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) for the following reasons:

- 1) I am aware that in 1997 the Parties CITES decided to include the Botswana population on Appendix II with an annotation to allow the export of live elephants to "appropriate and acceptable destinations." I do not consider their first destination in South Africa to be appropriate or acceptable because of their incarceration in South Africa under cruel and injurious conditions. Furthermore, I do not consider their final destination, public display, to be appropriate or acceptable because they are destined for zoos and circuses some of them in

countries (specifically China) that are known internationally for their inhumane treatment of animals. Therefore, I do not consider the export of these elephants from Botswana to be in accordance with CITES.

2) I am aware that, under the terms of CITES Article IV (c), the export of live specimens of Appendix II species, such as the elephants from Botswana, must be "prepared and shipped as to minimize the risk of injury, damage to health or cruel treatment." After viewing the videotape of the elephants being held in South Africa, however, it is clear to me that these elephants have been and are being subjected to unnecessary cruel and injurious treatment and damage to physical and emotional health, as defined above. This means to me that the government of South Africa should not issue re-export permits for these animals because such re-export would violate CITES Article IV (c). Moreover, I consider the removal of dependent elephant calves from their family groups to be unnecessarily cruel and that this, too, has resulted in damage to the mental and physical health of the calves. Therefore, I believe the granting of the export permit by Botswana to be a violation of CITES Article IV (c).

Conclusion

The purpose of pouring of buckets of water over the elephant's head, the beatings, the tight chaining, the deprivation of sleep, food and water is to break the elephants. The traditional "spirit breaking" method of taming elephants is by its very nature and definition cruel and inhuman. This method may have been used for centuries in Asia to train and dominate captive elephants, but as we approach the new millenium it is totally unacceptable and unethical. It is shocking to know that in a country like South Africa this kind of treatment of animals is still officially sanctioned.

I am of the opinion that the elephants should be returned to the Tuli Block and reunited with their families. If the calves are returned to the location they were captured, their calling would soon attract the attention of elephant families. It is known that elephants can both communicate over distances of several kilometers and can recognise the voices of several hundred different individuals. With time I believe that most of the youngsters would find their families. I believe that this exercise can succeed and I believe that southern Africa has the expertise to undertake it.

Elephants are long-lived, large brained highly social mammals. The more we learn about elephants the sooner we will have to face the very real ethical issues that our current management policies raise. For the truth is that treating beings such as elephants without empathy places the very character of our species at issue.

Dated

Signed

Joyce H. Poole, Ph.D.

“Today you say that elephants are archaic and cumbersome, that they interfere with roads and telegraph poles, and tomorrow you’ll begin to say that human rights too are obsolete and cumbersome, that they interfere with progress....”

Romain Gary

The Roots of Heaven, 1958