



## FONZ Forum

Friends of the National Zoo wholeheartedly and enthusiastically welcomes the National Zoo's commitment to building a new Zoo habitat for Asian elephants, as described on the facing page by Interim Zoo Director David Evans. FONZ is dedicated to supporting the Zoo's efforts and we look forward to helping the Zoo create a future for Asian elephants here.

The National Zoo staff is developing very exciting plans for the new elephant facility. This facility, I'm sure you'll be happy to hear, will let us keep Kandula here as he grows into a powerful adult male—at 3½ years old he already weighs 3,100 pounds—and will enable the Zoo's female elephants to produce more babies in the years ahead. Moreover, staff are working to design the new habitat to meet all the needs of elephants, ensuring that these intelligent social animals live happy and healthy lives while contributing to the survival of their species, and inspiring members of our species to contribute as well. As these plans are finalized, FONZ members will be the first to hear the details as we ask you to support your Zoo.

But building a new Asian elephant exhibit at the Zoo is just the most visible component of an expansive—and expanding—program to celebrate, study, and protect these majestic endangered creatures in our Zoo and in the wild. With support from FONZ, our scientists are working with their colleagues at zoos throughout North America to improve the health and breeding success of elephants in zoos. Without this work, elephants could well become extinct in zoos and we would lose this important insurance policy against their becoming extinct in the wild. FONZ is also helping to support studies of Asian elephants in the wild, tracking their movements, mapping their habitats, and finding ways to reduce conflicts between elephants and the people who live among them.

We are also in the preliminary stages of planning a major new education initiative around elephants, modeled on the success of our award-winning Conservation Central Web-based education program. Conservation Central lets classrooms and families explore the complex issues surrounding the conservation of giant pandas and other endangered species that live in temperate-forest habitats. The world faces unprecedented pressures—on people and on wildlife and wild lands. The problems and opportunities these pressures create are mainly biological, making biological education essential. Harnessing the power of elephants to inspire children and adults alike, and using innovative distance-learning technology, our program will teach people around the world about wildlife, the natural world, and our place in the natural world.

As David Evans points out, building an elephant habitat, developing a new education program, and continuing and expanding elephant research and conservation will be neither easy nor inexpensive. Critics who believe that no zoo can be a good home for elephants will likely try to undermine our efforts. I believe it would be tragic if our children and grandchildren lost the chance ever to see an elephant, to marvel at its vastness and gaze spellbound at its amazing combination of strength, dignity, and grace. But I am confident that FONZ members and many other people in our community will generously support our efforts to keep elephants at the National Zoo and help them survive in the wild, knowing that children will be grateful for our success long into the future.

I will continue to share our plans and progress with you in the months ahead. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to email me (at [j Schroeder@fonz.org](mailto:j Schroeder@fonz.org)) your thoughts and ideas about elephants and any of our other programs, and help us make your Zoo the best in the world for animals and the people who love them.

Sincerely,

James M. Schroeder  
Executive Director



is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the conservation, education, and research efforts of the Smithsonian's National Zoo. Formed in 1958, FONZ was one of the first conservation organizations in the nation's capital. Friends of the National Zoo is dedicated to supporting the National Zoo in a joint mission to study, celebrate, and protect the diversity of animals and their habitats.

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**Membership** in FONZ offers many benefits: programs, publications, discounts on shipping and events, free parties and invitations to special programs and activities to make zooping more enjoyable and educational. To join, write FONZ Membership, National Zoological Park, 3001 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20008-2537, call 202.633.3034, or go to [www.fonz.org](http://www.fonz.org).

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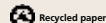
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**Cover photo:** A polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*) rests on the ice near Churchill, Canada. Photo by Don Getty/[www.dongettyphoto.com](http://www.dongettyphoto.com).



The Smithsonian's National Zoo is accredited by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association.

## Letter from David L. Evans



### Elephants in Our Future

Many of you are aware of the current controversy clouding the future of elephants in zoos. Critics charge that elephants don't belong in zoos and are demanding they be removed from our collections. The National Zoo's very first animals were the Asian elephants, Dunk and Gold Dust, who arrived in Rock Creek Park even before bison made their famous walk up Connecticut Avenue from the Smithsonian Castle. Ever since, elephants have lived at the Zoo, amazing and delighting millions of people for more than a century.

Yet, one can legitimately ask if elephants, with all of their complex physical, social, and psychological requirements, can truly be happy and healthy in a zoo. All of us at the National Zoo agreed that if we could not say "yes," we would reluctantly have to do without elephants. Fortunately, that is not the case. Our scientists, animal care staff, and veterinarians know how to create an environment that meets elephants' needs for exercise, shelter, companions, and interesting activity—an environment in which females raise their young and all enjoy good health and long life. Our specialists in animal husbandry, behavior, ecology, nutrition, genetics, veterinary medicine, reproductive sciences, pathology, and conservation biology work together to discover and apply new knowledge to ensure that all of our animals thrive in the Zoo and their species survive in the wild. Our scientists were the first to identify the often deadly herpes virus that attacks elephants, and were part of an international team that developed an artificial-insemination technique for elephants. Our reproduction laboratory currently monitors the reproductive hormones of more than 200 elephants in the United States to identify the most viable females for breeding.

We have learned quite a lot since the time of Dunk and Gold Dust and we know that building a great new place for our Asian elephants—eventually a group of females, males, and young—is essential. We cannot leave our female elephants in their current outdated accommodations, and keeping our growing young male, Kandula, there will soon be impossible. The sprawling new elephant habitat and house we envision will feature spacious, enriching indoor and outdoor areas, as well as places where visitors can learn about elephants, about what our scientists are doing to save these marvelous animals in the wild, and about what all of us can do to help. This will be neither easy nor inexpensive, but with a generous commitment from Congress and the support of private donors and the public, we can make this happen.

But the real question is not if we can do it, but should we?

Only 35,000 to 50,000 Asian elephants survive in the wild. The threats they face are familiar. Poaching for ivory tusks and other human-caused deaths are persistent problems, but the most severe threat is loss of habitat due to logging and conversion for agriculture. Asian elephants need forest with plenty of forage and water—habitat that is also ideal for human use. The effects of habitat loss are made worse by the division of what remains into small "islands" separated from each other by terrain impassible to elephants. Inbreeding in such isolated populations can lead to reduced fertility, increased risk of disease, and, ultimately, extinction. Moreover,

small, hemmed-in populations are always at risk from natural catastrophes such as flood, drought, or fire, and conflicts such as war and other social upheavals. Our scientists are mapping remaining habitat in Asia to identify the most promising areas for conservation action, as well as studying the impact of the recent tsunami on elephants in Sri Lanka—a perfect example of a natural catastrophe that could have decimated an elephant population.

What makes the Asian elephant's situation in the wild all the more dire is that no self-sustaining zoo population exists as insurance against the species' extinction—something our scientists and their colleagues are making every effort to change. Their success in bringing Kandula into the world is a testament to the value of their work.

But science alone cannot ensure a future for elephants. People everywhere must be committed to making room for these magnificent animals in our crowded world. The National Zoo's purpose is to bring the natural world to our mostly urban American visitors: to inspire, to inform, and to involve them with elephants and other wild animals that live far from our cities but may be essential to our own survival.

Few creatures are so awesome and inspiring as elephants. No film or image can convey the extraordinary reality of a living elephant, but very few Americans will ever see one in the wild. Because we do have the space and the expertise, it is the obligation of the nation's zoo to let people see an elephant as the "real thing," and thus be moved to a commitment to saving them.

We all have memories of first making contact with elephants. For some it is as a child gripping a parent's hand on first sight of such an immense creature. For me, it was a look into an elephant's eye. As a college student in Philadelphia, I would visit the zoo to take photographs. Very few of those pictures remain, but I have kept one—a black-and-white side view of an elephant's face. I am still drawn to the look in her eye. In Kenya last summer, I photographed elephants again. Looking through those pictures, I found one of an elephant with the same look as the one from years ago. How can looking past the wrinkles in the soul of an animal to see its strength and dignity not move you?

We at the National Zoo are determined to preserve people's ability to have such an experience, now and long into the future, in zoos and in the faraway places where elephants still roam. I hope you will join in supporting our efforts to keep elephants at the National Zoo.

Sincerely,

David L. Evans

Under Secretary for Science, Smithsonian Institution,  
and Interim Director of the Smithsonian's National Zoological Park