



Contact:

Ciara Castellanoz
Marketing Manager
559-498-5936 (office)
559-303-9286 (cell)

CCastellanoz@fresnochaffeezoo.org

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AFRICAN ELEPHANT EUTHANIZED DESPITE CUTTING-EDGE TREATMENTS

Fresno, CA – Officials at Fresno Chaffee Zoo are deeply saddened to announce the death of 30-year-old female African elephant, Amy.

Despite over two years of advanced medical treatments, Amy was humanely euthanized on December 11, 2017 due to a rapid decline in health which originated from a ligament tear in her right elbow.

“Amy’s ligament tear led to her development of severe arthritis,” said Dr. Shannon Nodolf, chief veterinary officer at Fresno Chaffee Zoo. “Amy’s inability to use her leg due to this injury greatly impacted her mobility and well-being by leading to the progressive, painful degeneration of her other joints. Although she had been under active veterinary care, we reached a point where we were unable to stop the progression of her decline and were no longer able to manage her pain.”

Amy came to Fresno Chaffee Zoo in May 2015, along with her daughter, Betts, from Riddle’s Elephant & Wildlife Sanctuary in Quitman, Arkansas. The exact cause of Amy’s ligament tear is unknown.

“Unfortunately, we won’t be able to identify the exact cause of her torn ligament,” Nodolf said. “A few months after Amy’s arrival in Fresno, the animal care team discovered that she was reluctant to bend her right elbow. Ever since then, we have been working persistently to improve her mobility and make her as comfortable as possible.”

In an attempt to improve Amy’s condition, the Zoo’s veterinary team consulted with experts from around the country, including the entire collective of the American Association of Zoological Veterinarians, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, Colorado State University School of Veterinary Medicine, National Zoo, San Diego Zoo Global and many more.

Treatments performed on Amy included nearly a dozen different medications for pain and inflammation, physical therapy, hydrotherapy, class IV laser therapy, kinesio tape therapy, IRAP (Interleukin 1 Receptor Antagonist Protein) treatments, and even stem cell therapy.

“We used state-of-the-art intra-articular stem cell therapy on Amy,” Nodolf said. “This is the first time that this type of therapy has ever been attempted in elephants. We are devastated that these cutting-edge treatments were unsuccessful and that the outcome is not what we had hoped for. However, the Zoo veterinary and elephant care teams feel confident that we exhausted every option.”

Zoo veterinary and animal care teams are working with pathologists to conduct a necropsy on Amy. Tissue samples and other parts of her remains will be analyzed for scientific study. These findings will allow Amy's veterinary and animal care teams to learn more about her health and help other elephants in the future.

Fresno Chaffee Zoo is currently home to two African elephants. The following statement was prepared by Amy's team of dedicated zookeepers:

"Amy was an extraordinary animal in every way. She was a very strong-willed elephant and taught us that when you invest the time and patience to build a relationship, it's always worth it. Through her life, she brought joy to so many people, and we were lucky enough to share in that joy for her final years. The elephant house will feel very empty without her big personality in it."

"Fresno Chaffee Zoo inspires wonder of our natural world, provides an engaging learning environment, and creates a passion for conservation."

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