

controlling elephants for centuries may find it difficult and insulting to be made to take up new methods that cannot be guaranteed any safer than what they know. Buckley describes her plan in the blog: "I have a very clear vision about fencing, what elephants should be allowed to do, and how much freedom they need to thrive." She will "walk the land" meant for the new facility and decide where to construct fences, etc. An Indian NGO "Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation", a partner organization will work with her so that she learns to work with Indian contractors. Buckley wants shade structures, corrals for doctoring and resting or sleeping, a vet lab and administrative office and housing for staff. She plans to recruit the Mahouts herself but the vets will be assigned by government. Buckley admits that when she started and ran her facility in USA (Tennessee) she didn't have to consider human welfare ... it was only the animals. But in India she has developed programs which have a strong education component ..."addressing the public welfare of the mahouts and their families" !!! This will, according to her, "ensure that they will be there to take care

of the elephants' needs" True enough...except when the mahouts are drunk or stoned which is part of their culture. Actually there are instances of elephants taking care of the mahouts when they imbibed too much! Higher salaries will provide much comfort to the canny mahouts. Buckley just might be in over her head!

Buckley's NGO Elephant Aid International is raising the \$200,000 estimated to raise this first "model" centre. Where is the Government of India going to get the crores of rupees to duplicate it dozens or maybe hundreds of times.

Interestingly, at the Tennessee elephant facility in USA, Buckley is said to have annoyed her own Board so much that they threw her out of her own organisation. She has a reputation for being hard to get along with.

It will be interesting to watch her interact with the Indian bureaucracy! God bless **both** Buckley and the MoEF so that at least the mahouts and elephants will benefit.

Opinion: Zoos vs Rescue Centres

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Managing captive elephants whatever the country and culture is too often guided by emotion rather than realistic and practical decisions. For captive elephant management in any given environment to be truly successful there needs to be a clear strategy, long term goals, and a plan that realistically addresses operational protocols, animal care standards, and staff policies.

Overall, discussions and controversy have led to increased efforts to address captive elephant concerns by improving care, husbandry, handling, and training techniques through the development of professional guidelines and standards, and by identifying welfare parameters important for captive elephant management.

Practical standards need to be developed to address the physical and social environment of these animals, as well as individual situations such as the need and use of the elephants, number of animals, type of environment (physical, work, social), personnel support and training, and animal welfare. Monitoring and enforcement mechanisms need to be considered to ensure successful implementation of standards. Written protocols are important to enable successful and consistent elephant management programs. Reviewing these protocols periodically ensures that standards are met and even improved where needed.

In the case of a country like India, elephants are managed in a wide variety of environments (i.e. forest camps, zoos, circus, temples, private owners); this variety offers a unique opportunity to set high standards of captive elephant management across all of these different types of environments, rather than being selective and only attempting to address the welfare of elephants in one type of environment, i.e. zoos.

Regarding the 2009 CZA directive to move zoo elephants to forest camps, it would be important to identify the biggest concerns about zoo elephant management - is it only the space in zoos? the elephant housing in zoos? the handling in zoos? the staff experience in zoos? all of these topics should be discussed, as all can be improved. Unless and until there have been attempts to rectify specific management problems in the zoo environment, moving elephants from that environment to another may only be moving the problems and not rectifying them.

There has also been discussion about establishing facilities called "elephant rescue centers". Creating a center for "rescued" elephants without first identifying and addressing captive elephant management problems in all facilities is short sighted. Any new facility will also have the same operational, animal, and staff issues as zoos, so efforts and resources should focus on helping all captive elephants in the country, not just a select few that may be housed in these centers.

If indeed enhanced captive elephant welfare is the objective, there needs to be a better assessment of captive elephant management from all sides, an identification and discussion about specific concerns, and a holistic strategy to best direct efforts and resources to reach this common goal.

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