



NEWS RELEASE

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ELDERLY ASIAN ELEPHANT LITTLE MAC HUMANELY EUTHANIZED AFTER SHARP DECLINE IN PHYSICAL CONDITION OVER LAST TWO WEEKS

Zoo's Elephant Program Ends After 47 Years with Little Mac and Sujatha

Santa Barbara, CA, September 26, 2019 – Little Mac, the Santa Barbara Zoo's 48-year-old Asian elephant, was humanely euthanized last night (Wednesday, September 25) at approximately 7 p.m. She was in her exhibit yard, surrounded by her keepers and other Zoo staff who have cared for her over the years. Her body was removed by crane to a truck and taken to the California Animal Health & Food Safety Laboratory in San Bernardino, which is run by U.C. Davis, where a necropsy will be initiated today (Thursday, September 26). The results will take several weeks to be developed and will contribute to ongoing research into the health and welfare of elephants under human care.

This followed several days of what Zoo officials called hospice care for the elderly elephant who arrived at the Zoo from India in 1972 with her companion Sujatha (pronounced sue-JAW-tha), who died in October 2018.

This decision was made due to her declining condition as a result of her ongoing medical issues, some of which were common in geriatric elephants and some new medical problems that had developed since June.

"She faced chronic challenges with her teeth and arthritis in her legs, but her overall condition began declining in June due to the onset of additional medical problems. She continued to decline in spite of our best efforts, especially in the past two weeks," said Dr. Julie Barnes, the Zoo's vice president of animal care and health. "We had exhausted the medical options available that would allow her to have a good quality of life. It was time to let her go."

End of Zoo's Elephant Program

Little Mac's passing marks the end of the Zoo's Elephant Program, which spanned 47 years. The pair of one-and-a-half-year-old elephants came to the Santa Barbara Zoo from the city of Mysore, India, in

exchange for six California sea lions. The two lived together at the Zoo their entire lives. Neither ever bred or produced offspring.

Current standards for elephant management set by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) focus on having bigger herds with breeding bulls, and larger exhibits, neither of which are possible at the Santa Barbara Zoo. The Zoo program was “grandfathered in” as the exhibit was especially designed for the two female elephants, and had been modified many times since 2004 to address the challenges the animals faced as they aged.

No plans have been made for future occupants of this exhibit.

Behavioral Study, Expert Consultations for Little Mac

“Since Sujatha passed away last fall, Little Mac hadn’t shown signs of depression or any other concerning behaviors. In fact, she had been doing quite well, despite being a singly-housed elephant,” says Dr. Barnes.

Data gathered during a behavioral study which began in November 2018 supports what keepers had observed since Sujatha passed away: that Little Mac was showing increased engagement with her environment, even when faced with changes in her routine and that environment.



“Following a bout with colic in June, both the study and keeper observations showed that the regular patterns of high level of engagement were being replaced with more ups and downs in her behaviors,” adds Dr. Barnes. “She would improve physically and behaviorally, we would be hopeful, but she never fully recovered.”

Early last week, keepers noticed a change in the color of Little Mac’s boli (dung). Tests indicated that there was bleeding in her intestines. The Zoo consulted about her diagnostics, treatment options and prognosis with well-respected elephant veterinarians Dr. Dennis Schmitt and Dr. Ellen Weidner, several veterinarians from San Diego Zoo Global, and local equine veterinarians. No diagnosis was reached.

After exhausting treatment options, Little Mac began receiving hospice care. Animal care staff treated her symptoms, provided her with drugs to keep her as comfortable as possible, and offered her usual training and activities.

About Sujatha & Little Mac; Little Mac Got Her Name

Sujatha was born to a working mother in an Indian logging camp, and Little Mac was discovered nearby in the forest, apparently orphaned. Herb Peterson, owner of several Santa Barbara McDonald’s restaurants paid for the two elephants’ trip airplane from India, and received naming rights for one of them. McDonald’s newest product was a burger called a “Big Mac,” so Peterson chose “Little Mac” for then four-foot-tall pachyderm.

It is believed that malnutrition as a calf in India contributed to Little Mac's lifelong dental issues, which resulted in two dental procedures costing \$100,000, and the eventual loss of all her upper teeth. For the past few years, her food had to be pre-chopped to help her with digestion.

She has been the Zoo's sole Asian elephant following the death of Sujatha who was humanely euthanized at age 47 on October 16, 2018, due to ailments related to old age.

An Asian elephant is considered geriatric around age 40. At 48, Little Mac exceeded the median life expectancy for Asian elephants in human care, which is 46.9 years. That means that half the animals live less than 46.9 years, and half live longer.

"Had Little Mac's health not declined, we may have been looking at moving her to another AZA-accredited facility or an elephant sanctuary," added Dr. Barnes. "The behavioral study suggested that she likely had the ability to cope with the changes associated with such a move and with being introduced to other elephants."

Remembering Little Mac & Sujatha; Grief Resources

The Zoo has partnered with VNA Health (formerly Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care) to provide guidance for Zoo staff and guests in dealing with grief following the loss of both Little Mac and Sujatha. This includes a session with Zoo staff and a blog posting on the Zoo's website about bereavement (www.sbzoo.org/loss) of loved ones and even pets and Zoo animals.

Donations in memory of Little Mac and Sujatha can be made to the International Elephant Foundation (www.elephantconservation.org) or to the Zoo's [Toys4Animals Amazon Wish List](#). Gifts of organic, pesticide-free tree trimmings and branches for other animals at the Zoo are also welcome (www.sbzoo.org/support/browse).

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*The **Santa Barbara Zoo** is located on 30 acres of botanic gardens and is home to nearly 500 individual animals in open, naturalistic habitats. It is accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) (AZA), representing the highest level of animal care, and participates in AZA endangered species programs for California condor, Channel Island fox, and Western lowland gorilla, among others. A private 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the Santa Barbara Zoo depends on community support, not tax dollars, for operations and improvements. Visit www.sbzoo.org.*