

New medical insights will guide Lucy the Elephant's care at the Edmonton Valley Zoo

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A collaborative, independent assessment of Lucy last fall has revealed new medical information about the 47-year-old Asian elephant.

Edmonton Valley Zoo and animal advocacy organization Free The Wild cooperated on an assessment of Lucy in October 2022. This assessment provided great insights into Lucy's health and wellness, including medical information previously unknown.

While the majority of visiting experts agreed with previous expert assessments that she is not fit to travel, they were not unanimous. After reviewing the reports in extensive detail, both the zoo and Free the Wild agree that Lucy is not fit to travel. She will remain at the Edmonton Valley Zoo where she has been cared for by a team of dedicated animal professionals for more than 45 years.

"We have been working with Free the Wild for more than two years to make this assessment happen. The zoo is grateful for the generous sponsorship from Free The Wild and its supporters. The international experts have identified some important insights that have already resulted in improvements to Lucy's health and well being," said Edmonton Valley Zoo Director Gary Dewar. "Conclusions from some of the visiting experts confirm what previous independent experts have advised about the very high risk presented if she were to travel. Over the past 45 years, staff at the Edmonton Valley Zoo have worked tirelessly to give Lucy the best care and best home she deserves. We will strive to ensure she continues to receive excellent care."

Among the new medical tests performed last fall was a blood gas analysis test, which showed that after minimal physical activity, Lucy had very severe hypoxemia and hypercapnia - which is low oxygen and high carbon dioxide levels in her blood and in her tissues. Two of the visiting veterinarians confirmed she breathes solely from her mouth, which they say is something they have never seen before.

Lucy's breathing issue is more serious than the visiting experts anticipated, as quantified by blood gas analysis, and unfortunately the root cause of the condition remains undiagnosed. The experts also discovered a uterine tumour (leiomyoma) which is quite common in female elephants who have never given birth. The tumour is large and is being treated with a vaccine which the visiting veterinarians recommended.

The assessment was performed by four international elephant veterinary and husbandry experts: Dr. Frank Goeritz, Dr. Thomas Hildebrandt, Dr. Patricia London, and Mr. Ingo Schmidinger. Several of their recommendations have been implemented, including changes to Lucy's diet and medical treatments. We're pleased to say that changes to Lucy's diet in the four months since the assessment took place have resulted in a 326 kilogram weight loss.

"I've travelled the world and I've been to many zoos and sanctuaries and circuses across the globe," said Sagan Cowne, Trustee and Director of Communications for Free the Wild. "What I've seen here in terms of commitment from the zoo staff is extraordinary. It's definitely a very good baseline from which any zoo should look to (to care for) their animals."

Lucy came to the zoo as a two-year-old orphan in 1977. Over the years, the zoo has modified its care plan to meet Lucy's changing needs. Her gradual retirement from public activities began in 2020, and the zoo will continue to evolve its elephant management program to accommodate Lucy's needs as she ages. Going forward, the zoo will continue to monitor Lucy's weight and overall health, as well as look at possible changes to her housing, enrichments, and routines.

"We are happy to have medical insights we didn't have before. We are looking forward to having some of these experts return later this year to do follow-up examinations," Dewar said. "We have and will continue to make adjustments necessary to provide Lucy with exceptional care."

An annual, independent assessment is required by Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) in order to maintain Lucy in Edmonton as a lone elephant. She has been assessed yearly by outside experts for more than a decade.

For more information on Lucy, including links to the written veterinary assessment reports, a statement from Free the Wild, and a video, please visit edmonton.ca/lucy.

For more information:

edmonton.ca/lucy

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