

October 11, 2013

News Release

For Immediate Release

Incident details following this morning's tragedy

Additional details are now available, following this morning's zookeeper fatality at Dickerson Park Zoo.

At the time of the incident, approximately 8:45 a.m., zookeepers were in the elephant barn, moving a 41-year-old female elephant, Patience, from the barn stalls into a chute.

The chute functions as a corridor connecting the barn to the yard. The chute is about 12 feet long, with adjustable walls which can be made wide or narrow. A narrow chute is useful for zookeepers to hold the animal when performing an inspection, which takes place at least twice a day. The chute's walls are made of 6-inch round metal bars, about 10 feet tall, spaced about 15 inches apart — wide enough for a human to walk through, but narrow enough to restrain an elephant.

Elephants are moved through the chute several times a day, and zookeepers reported there was nothing unusual about this particular movement from the barn.

Zookeepers reported that Patience's behavior had been hesitant and submissive since the Oct. 4 death of Connie (Pinky), the elephant herd's matriarch. They were watching her carefully, because of this behavior. Three zookeepers were present; a minimum of two zookeepers are required to be present when approaching the protective barrier.

The morning of the incident, Patience hesitated in the chute, and elephant manager John Phillip Bradford, 62, was coaxing her forward. Bradford leaned into the chute, reaching for her with a guide. The animal suddenly lunged forward, knocking Bradford down, into the chute. The animal then crushed Bradford against the floor, killing him instantly.

The other zookeepers moved quickly to pull the animal away from Bradford. The whole incident took place in a matter of seconds.

Bradford's actions were consistent with zoo policies and AZA Guidelines for Elephant Management and Care.

The Springfield Police Department was on site immediately after the incident and conducted an initial investigation. When finalized their report will be made available to the City's internal investigation team, which will include Parks Administration, Dickerson Park Zoo Management, City Safety staff from the Human Resources Department, and any additional resources needed. In addition to the City's internal investigation, there will be other investigations by appropriate

oversight agencies, including the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Accreditation Commission.

Dickerson Park Zoo is internationally recognized for its elephant program. The zoo is the recipient of the 1997 Edward H. Bean Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, honoring the zoo's elephant breeding program.

Dickerson Park Zoo's highest priority right now is supporting staff members, friends and family through the tragedy of losing a staff member.

The combined events of losing the elephant herd's matriarch, Connie (Pinky) to kidney disease Oct. 4, and now the death of elephant manager John Bradford, have had a tremendous impact upon the zoo staff. Zoo officials respectfully request privacy of staff members, friends and family.

No additional information will be released today.

Zoo media contact information for Saturday, Oct. 12:

Jenny Fillmer Edwards, Public Information Administrator, Springfield-Greene County Park Board, 417-224-5510.

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