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News Release

For Immediate Release

Ultrasound Provides Insight on Elephant’s Condition

An ultrasound examination performed on one of Dickerson Park Zoo’s elephants has provided new information about the animal’s condition. As the zoo has previously reported, zookeepers have observed signs of physical weakness and mobility problems in the zoo’s oldest elephant, Ol’ C.C.

A local vascular surgeon assisted Dr. Erica Wilson, DVM, the zoo’s staff veterinarian, to visualize Ol’ C.C.’s spine and some internal organs. During the spinal examination, the doctors identified two fractured lumbar vertebrae with minor damage to the spinal cord.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint exactly, the veterinarian suspects the injury occurred earlier this month when C.C. fell in the yard during an exercise walk. Dr. Wilson suspects the anti-tuberculocidal medications previously given to the elephant contributed to her becoming disoriented and falling. The medications were discontinued earlier this month after six months of therapy. Also, blood work results indicate liver function problems associated with the medications and the elephant’s decreased appetite.

C.C. is very alert and responsive to the animal care staff and continues to interact with the elephant herd. To aid C.C.’s recovery from the back injury, zoo staff are fabricating a back brace for the 8,000-pound animal. The brace will provide spinal support, reducing range of motion and promoting healing. Dr. Wilson anticipates C.C. will need to wear the brace for at least six weeks. The zoo staff believes this is the first time this type of recovery has been attempted with an elephant.

Additionally, Dr. Wilson is initiating treatment that will include Vitamin C, anti-inflammatory and pain medications. If C.C.’s appetite improves and her liver function improves, a medication to aid in muscle relaxation may be added. Dr. Wilson and the zoo’s animal care staff remain very guarded and cautious with the prognosis of C.C.’s recovery.

Ol’ C.C. is in her early 60s. She is the oldest elephant in the zoo’s herd of five and the fourth oldest elephant living in zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. C.C. is among the 15 oldest living elephants listed in the Asian elephant studbook for North America. C.C. came to Dickerson Park Zoo in May 1954 as the original elephant in what grew into Dickerson Park Zoo’s internationally recognized elephant program during the 1990s. Her birth year is estimated to be 1949.
C.C. will continue being housed off-exhibit with a companion elephant “Pinky.” Zoo guests can view two elephant cows, “Moola” and “Patience” in the exhibit yard.

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