

Letter from Dr. Daphne Sheldrick  
to Mrs. Löcker / **Österreichischer Tierschutzverein**

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October 2005

Dear Ms. Locker,

I have viewed the DVD you sent me depicting what would appear to be unacceptably cruel training methods imposed on the baby elephant in the Zoo. Although the quality of the tape was rather poor, and we could not get sound, there was no doubt about what was taking place. I have the following observations to make.

1. Forcibly separating the baby from its elephant family is, in itself, about the most traumatic and cruel thing anyone can impose on a baby elephant and especially a female, whose life is inextricably intertwined intimately with the female members of its family for life. It is difficult to understand why this should be deemed necessary. This, in itself, is an act of extreme cruelty.
2. This forcible separation has quite obviously traumatised the calf. The tail is raised, which denotes anxiety and fear. About 5 or 6 men then surround the calf, some armed with what would appear to be hooked ankuses, and having roped, initially its legs, and then its entire body with a loop, the calf is forcibly pulled to the ground by men pulling on the rope, whilst one or two people armed with ankuses hook it on the back and other parts of the body to hasten its compliance. One man with an ankus is seen hovering around the back of the elephant's ears, no doubt using the ankus in what is an extremely sensitive spot behind the ears. Repeatedly the calf is forced to the ground, after which something is inserted into its mouth, and whilst it is prostrate, it is patted, supposedly as a reward. Every time it gets up, it is again pulled to the ground, using both ankuses on its back and hind legs, and ropes pulled by men in what resembles a tug-of-war. Each time the calf collapses to the ground, the "patting" of its body is repeated.
3. Supposedly, what is taking place is the Zoo Keepers' method of trying to *train* this calf, using unacceptably brutal methods. Elephants will respond to kindness, tone of voice, and reward, if they have reason to feel affection for their Keepers. Treating an elephant brutally, as in the Video I have viewed, is a recipe for disaster in the longterm, because the elephant will one day settle the score by killing one of its persecutors. I find it very sad, and, indeed, shocking, that within what one would hope would be an enlightened Zoo in a civilized Western country, such brutality still takes place, supposedly condoned by those in authority. One would not be surprised to see this sort of cruel treatment of an elephant in the Far East, because training methods of elephants there are notoriously repugnant and brutal in an attempt to break the spirit of the animal and force obedience and compliance. The Asian elephant is a lot more tolerant than its African cousin, who will harbour a grudge, sometimes for years, and ultimately kill. At one point the baby

elephant is seen rubbing its forehead into the floor, an indication of what this elephant would like to do to its persecutors. Treated like this, one day it will. Elephants have very long memories, and the actions of the Zoo personnel towards this young elephant will certainly not endear them to it. The psychological torture and physical abuse is totally unacceptable in this, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, when humans should be better enlightened about how to handle animals in their care. In my opinion, the actions of the Zoo personnel contravene all the acceptable ways of handling a captive animal, and especially an elephant. What I saw in the Video is disturbing, disgusting, and brutal. Such cruelty should never be allowed in any civilized country, and especially in a Zoo that enjoys a reasonable reputation for caring and nurturing. What is taking place in the Video is certainly not that, and should not be allowed to continue.

I hope the above observations will help to bring about more humane handling of the baby elephant, unfortunate to have been born in a captive situation at the mercy of brutal Handlers.

Yours Sincerely,

*Dr. Daphne Shelbrick*

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