

February 26, 2020

Edward J. Goncz
Chair, Board of Directors
Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium

Via e-mail

Dear Mr. Goncz,

I'm writing on behalf of PETA to express strong opposition to a secret attempt by the Pittsburgh Zoo to buy baby elephants from Zimbabwe in order to confine and eventually breed them at its International Conservation Center. In light of the trauma and cruelty inherent in tearing these animals from their families and homes, PETA urges the zoo's board to oppose any and all efforts to capture and import elephants.

[Public records](#) reveal that last March, the zoo applied to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) for permission to import 13 juvenile elephants who would be torn away from their families in Zimbabwe.* Although a sale price wasn't disclosed, the records show that the zoo would pay to have the elephants be captured and that the money would be used to benefit humans through the construction of roads and buildings. Although the FWS confirmed yesterday that the zoo has since withdrawn this application, PETA has submitted [comments](#) to the agency opposing any other attempt by the zoo to capture and import elephants.

As the comments explain, the methods used to capture baby elephants are violent and terrifying: Snipers gun down the youngsters with tranquilizers from helicopters, which then chase off the elephants' frantic families. The babies are bound and dragged onto trailers and trucked to holding pens, where they may languish for months before being exported. [Video footage](#) from one capture shows men kicking and slapping a disoriented calf.

These operations cause lifelong trauma, both to the young elephants—who will never see their nurturing families again—and to their mothers, siblings, and relatives. Renowned elephant biologist and ethologist Dr. Joyce Poole has [written](#) that to "violently tear a family apart by capturing live calves ... is cruel and should not be condoned on any grounds." She is one of 55 global elephant specialists who expressed [vehement opposition](#) to importing wild-caught calves last year.

Global wildlife trade regulators agree. At the August 2019 Conference of the Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, a majority of countries voted to limit trade in African elephants taken from Botswana and Zimbabwe. Except in "exceptional circumstances,"

*The application originally called for the capture of 28 elephants, 15 of whom would go to other U.S. facilities. However, all facilities other than the Pittsburgh Zoo withdrew last summer.

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elephants in these countries must stay in their natural ranges and can't be sent to zoos.

Elephants are social, emotional, and intelligent animals with homes, families, and friends that matter to them. They're not artifacts to be plundered or collector's items to be put on display. International experts and regulators agree. The Pittsburgh Zoo must abandon any further attempts to tear elephant families violently apart. PETA urges the zoo's board of directors to prioritize ethical conduct and animal well-being by adopting a policy to oppose efforts to capture elephants from the wild, end elephant breeding, and phase out the zoo's elephant program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Rachel Mathews", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Rachel Mathews, Esq.

Deputy Director | Captive Animal Law Enforcement

cc: Barbara Baker, D.V.M., President and CEO, Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium