



## Pinnewala Elephant 'Orphanage'

### Born Free Position & Recommendations - June 2006

Following a series of visits to the Pinnewala Elephant 'Orphanage' in Sri Lanka, the Born Free Foundation has expressed concern about some of the practices conducted by this facility. A background document on Pinnewala is available separately, as are reports on two visits to the site made in 2004 and 2006. This document details Born Free's concerns and the steps that we would recommend to address them and establish protocols that we would endorse.

#### **Chaining**

##### ***Concerns***

Currently all adult male elephants at Pinnewala are chained up by at least one leg, either at the river or at the main site, for the majority of the time. When in musth (a state of arousal occurring approximately annually and lasting for several weeks or months) the males are chained by three legs permanently until the condition ends. Born Free would like to see the practice of chaining elephants kept to an absolute minimum, and ideally to be ended entirely.

##### ***Suggestions***

Born Free would like to see enclosures constructed which can safely contain these male elephants, both outside and during musth periods, allowing them to move without physical restriction and have access to appropriate environmental conditions (eg sufficient space, shade and water). Additional skilled elephant handling staff should be hired to supervise the animals on a one-on-one basis if they are to be taken to the river or leave the enclosure for other reasons. Restraint should only be used when absolutely essential (possibly for medical treatment), and for the minimum time possible.

#### **Transfers**

##### ***Concerns***

Pinnewala has a history of transferring elephants to other establishments, both nationally and internationally, for a range of purposes. The conditions of care in many of these establishments are very low by international standards of captive animal welfare. We do not believe that this practice is consistent with the mission of an 'orphanage', which should guarantee the highest care standards for its animals.

##### ***Suggestions***

Born Free would like to see an end to the transfer of animals from Pinnewala to any zoos, temples or private collections either in Sri Lanka or overseas. The only acceptable reason for transferring elephants would be to provide a higher standard of care at a facility with compatible goals, and improve the welfare of the individual animal concerned.

#### **Breeding**

##### ***Concerns***

Pinnewala has operated a breeding programme since the 1980s, over which time some 20 or so elephants have been born at the facility – an average of around one year. Born Free does not believe that this practice has any conservation value for the Asian elephant in general or the Sri Lanka subspecies in particular, but simply generates more elephants that will only ever experience the inadequate conditions of captivity. Born Free does not believe that this practice is consistent with the missions of an 'orphanage', which should be minimising the number of animals held in such conditions.

##### ***Suggestions***

Born Free would like to see the practice of breeding elephants at Pinnewala halted immediately. Breeding could be prevented by immuno-contraception or by restricting the access of males to fertile females.

## **Visitors**

### ***Concerns***

At times, visitors to Pinnewala are strongly encouraged by elephant keepers to have direct contact with the elephants, in exchange for financial reward (tips). Born Free does not believe that this practice is conducted in the best interest of the animals that are being cared for at the facility, and is especially concerned that the practice of tipping can become the primary motivation for the keepers, thus overriding welfare considerations. It could also pose a safety hazard for visitors who come in close proximity to these potentially dangerous and ultimately unpredictable animals.

### ***Suggestions***

Ideally, all direct contact between the animals and regular visitors should be halted. If there is to be any direct contact then it should be carefully managed and only conducted with the free and willing participation of the animals involved. Visitors should be clearly instructed not to give tips to keepers – instead a donations box should be promoted and the money collected shared by all staff on the basis of rewarding best husbandry practice. (In the case of paying volunteers staying at the facility for a period of weeks, direct contact may be considered appropriate if it makes a positive contribution to the elephants' welfare.)

## **General welfare**

### ***Concerns***

Elephants have been seen chained in direct sunlight in the middle of the day.

### ***Suggestions***

Management of the animals should be more closely supervised and protocols should be established which prioritise the welfare of the elephants including their behavioural and social needs. Supervisory staff should monitor adherence to these protocols to ensure that the animals receive a high standard of care and are not subjected to any unnecessary suffering or discomfort.

## **SUMMARY**

Born Free understands the need for a sanctuary for elephants that cannot be returned to the wild in Sri Lanka. As an organisation we have significant expertise around the world in providing lifetime care for other species on this basis, and supporting other organisations that do so. However, we do not believe that the current practices and policies of the Pinnewala Elephant 'Orphanage' are appropriate for a facility of this type. Were the suggestions above to be acted upon, and following a review of the situation to ensure there are no other concerns, Born Free would reconsider its current opposition to the facility.