

elephants the big picture

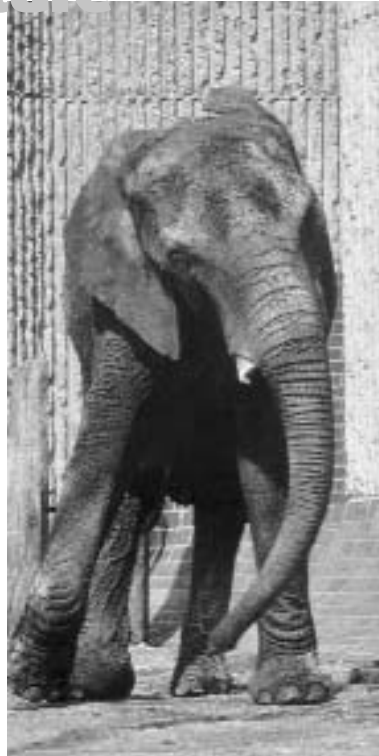
BACKGROUND STORY One by one

Born Free never forgets the importance of the individual ... both the individual animals we help, and the individual people making a difference. At the heart of the Foundation lies the true story of one little elephant – Pole Pole.

Pole Pole's story

After filming Born Free in Kenya, Bill Travers began to produce wildlife films including 'An Elephant Called Slowly' (1969) also set in Kenya, and featuring Pole Pole the elephant calf. Pole Pole was only two when she was torn from her wild family as a gift to London Zoo and was due to be exported after the filming. Bill and Virginia tried to prevent the move, but she was sent to the Zoo.

Then in 1982 Bill and Virginia went to see Pole Pole in London Zoo. Lonely, confused and unpredictable, Pole Pole frustratedly paced her barren enclosure. Prematurely aged by captivity, she swayed abnormally to and fro. They called her name. She stopped and turned and came to them her trunk outstretched, straining to touch their reaching hands. Even in her distress, this intelligent, most sensitive of animals remembered them. It was a heartbreaking and life-changing moment.



In 1983 Pole Pole collapsed and died, aged just 16. Yet in the wild elephants can live to over 60 years. Outraged by her death Bill and Virginia were determined. Her short life would not be in vain. Elephants, like all wild creatures, do not belong in captivity. Together with their son Will Travers they launched Zoo Check in 1984, the charity that has evolved into the Born Free Foundation.



"My feelings of despair and outrage at Pole Pole's death are undiminished now, 23 years later," says Virginia. "But her death was not in vain - we wouldn't let it be. Even those with the briefest understanding of elephants now realise how terrible it is for this wisest, cleverest and most sensitive of animals to be kept in captivity. Pole Pole, like Elsa the lioness, lit a flame in our hearts. It must never go out."

