

## ELEPHANTS AT THE OREGON ZOO: A HISTORY

If there were an elephant capital of North America, it would likely be located at the Oregon Zoo. The zoo has been a pioneer in elephant breeding for nearly six decades, and much of its history is intimately intertwined with elephants. Many important zoo milestones involve these gentle yet giant creatures, which have inspired generations of visitors while helping scientists and researchers make important breakthroughs — discoveries that have helped us better understand and protect elephants around the world.

The story starts with an elephant named Rosy, who arrived in Portland from Thailand in 1953. Rosy sparked public excitement for a zoo that was then largely outdated and overlooked, and following her arrival, voters passed a special levy to finance construction of a new, modern facility at the current zoo's location — a levy that voters had rejected just a few years before.

The zoo opened at its new location in 1959. Only three years later, the zoo made history when Packy was born on April 14, 1962. Packy was the first elephant

to have been born in the Western Hemisphere in 44 years. At the time, only nine other elephants had been born in North America. The event earned international attention and drew more than a million visitors to the zoo for the first time. Life magazine covered the momentous occasion with a lengthy feature describing the "nativity of Packy."

Packy's birth kicked off a baby boom among Oregon Zoo elephants. Not half a year later, Rosy, the zoo's original elephant, gave birth to Me-Tu. Over the next four decades, more elephants were born here than at any other zoo in North America. When the Association of Zoos and Aquariums created its Species Survival Plan for elephants in 1985, the Oregon Zoo played a central role. Mike Keele, now the zoo's director of elephant habitats, was a chief architect of the plan, which coordinates breeding efforts among AZA-member organizations across the country.



While its breeding efforts have earned it an international reputation, the zoo has also encouraged and actively participated in groundbreaking elephant research. Discoveries made here have profoundly improved our ability to understand and protect these endangered animals. In the 1970s, researchers at the zoo learned how to determine the estrous cycle of female elephants, one of the most important keys to understanding elephant breeding. And, while observing the zoo's elephant herd in 1984, scientist Katherine B. Payne discovered that elephants use infrasonic communication, producing sounds outside the range of human hearing.

Currently, the Oregon Zoo is partnering with several North American zoos and universities to conduct a new study of elephant welfare, one of the first major research projects to look at positive indicators of elephants' well-being — in essence, signs that an elephant is mentally and physically fit. The zoo also continues to track progesterone levels in its female elephants to better understand elephant reproduction. The progesterone information collected at the zoo is now the largest long-term data set about elephant estrous cycles in the world.

In addition to such research, the Oregon Zoo has played an important role in implementing the highest possible standards of care and management for elephants. Through its AZA affiliation, the zoo has hosted a variety of conferences and events — like the first and second North American Conferences on Elephant Foot Care and Pathology and the fifth International Elephant Research Symposium — that gather elephant experts from across the country and around the globe. The zoo participates in these events to ensure our herd benefits from the most current management practices regarding diet, exercise, enrichment and health care.



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When bull elephant Tusko joined the herd in 2005, the zoo again began breeding among its elephants, adding a new chapter to an already rich history. The Oregon Zoo is now home to three cows, three bulls and one young male. Five members of this tightly knit family were born at the Oregon Zoo, and Rose-Tu has another calf on the way. Due in late fall of 2012, the new baby isn't the only exciting thing in store for the elephants:

Designs for the zoo's new elephant habitat are under way, with construction scheduled to begin in 2013. The herd's new home will include a variety of habitats and terrain, from open meadow to hilly forest, and will offer more opportunities for the elephants to make choices about how and where they spend their time — inside or outside, in a group or away from the herd, playing in the water or walking through the grass.

