



# *Protected Contact Elephant Training with Alan Roocroft Diary 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> June 2010*

*By Rachel Saunders*

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## Progress since February:

- Nissim & Buta now present all 4 feet in a relaxed way allowing safe access for footcare, & to both elephants present their ears through the ear ports allowing the ears to be felt & also the veins to be pinched. Buta's left ear is folded so she has limited movement with this ear but will flick it out, she is unable to put this ear through the port
- Juba is now presenting all 4 feet for foot scrubs
- Ashanti joined the training programme and is presenting her front feet for brushing, she lifts her back feet erratically, but enjoys training
- Shaba has learnt to understand the 'Target' command but hasn't grasped foot lifts
- A large amount of alterations have been made to the facility: removal of meshwork on steel panels to improve visual contact with elephants, foot stirrups of 2 sizes have been made by the welder, a PC wall has been installed in the old elephant house, extra lighting has been fitted to illuminate training areas.
- The team is still feeling boosted with the progression of the PC programme.
- Enrichment had been installed in all the night pens- large rocks, scratching posts, logs/tree stumps, tyres strapped to the panels, hay nets in all pens. Nissim's stereotypical pacing behaviour has decreased from ~50% in 2008 to ~5% to date, we continue to monitor this behaviour and hope to implement further enrichment devices. Nissim has also decreased the percentage of time he spends resting leaning left, therefore reducing some of the pressure on his left feet/side

**Buta, Nissim and Juba** can now be moved safely around the facility

## **Keepers:**

- Keepers continued to improve communication

- Update article in Stanley Newsletter explaining the PC training, also contacted American Association of Zookeepers r.e. publication of training documents
- Continued sharing PC experience with other keepers at KSP

### Alan Roocroft's Visit June 2010

#### **Discussion:**

Alan Roocroft was pleased with how we work as a team, and the professional way we move elephants around the facility for training sessions and weighing. He was impressed with the alterations of the facility to aid PC, and also with the addition of enrichment to the night pens. These small changes have improved the welfare of the elephants and improved the herd structure in a very short space of time. Alan highlighted how much we have achieved since October 2009 when the training programme began. Our learning curve has been steep with 5 elephants at various stages on the training programme

#### **Goals:**

- Advise on training Shaba and settling rear feet lift for Juba and Ashanti
- Lessons in footcare
- Begin training with Tots and Nala

#### **NISSIM**

7.6.10

- Nissim presented all 4 feet for scrubbing. AR observed the training and advised that Nissim was settled enough for keepers to try footcare on all the feet. The front cuticles and a couple of nails need some trimming. Nails 2 and 3 on both front feet showed signs of wear on the front, possibly caused by Nissim resting his feet while sleeping (see figures 1a & 1b). The rear feet have excessive pad growth, ~1/2inch (see figure 2)



**Figure 1a & 1b: Nissim's front left foot**



**Figure 2: Nissim's back left foot showing pad overgrowth**

- Nissim presented both ears very well. AR was pleased to see this and our ability to pinch the veins (see figure 3). AR advised we contact the vet for some moisturizing cream to apply to Nissim's rear ear lobes which are showing dry skin build up possibly caused by Nissim's resting position



**Figure 3: Large veins visible and pinched, possibilities for blood draws**

#### 8.6.10

- Nissim had 2 training sessions, the first was short due to Nissim being eager to go out. Jen (vet) was able to observe the pressure sores on Nissim's ear lobes and has prescribed 'Dermasol' cream to be applied daily to hopefully break down the built up skin and to moisturize the lobes
- The far elephant paddock was opened in the morning so Nissim had to be called down for training. We proceeded with a full training session, scrubbing all 4 feet. AR trimmed the overgrowth of cuticles and dead nail on the front feet. AR and RS trimmed the pad overgrowth on the rear feet using a hoofknife (see figure 4). As a team we discussed future footcare and AR has said we can proceed with this when we see necessary



**Figure 4: RS trimming Nissim's back left foot**

- Again, we requested 'ear' & Nissim allowed us to touch the dry area of the lobes
- After the session we discussed blood draws and how we can practice this procedure using a drinking straw taped to cardboard to resemble the ear and vein. Using a butterfly needle the technique could be practiced. We would collaborate with Jen r.e. quantities of blood required for analysis

#### 9.6.10

- We had to call Nissim from the far paddock again. We undertook a full training regime scrubbing all 4 feet. AR trimmed nail 5 on Nissim's FLF (see figure 5), Nissim remained settled during the foot trim. SS helped to trim the rear pads on Nissim's feet to finish trimming the overgrown pads (see figures 6 & 7)



**Figure 5: Nissim's front left foot post nail trim**



**Figure 6: SS trimming Nissim's back left foot**



**Figure 7: Nissim's back left foot post pad trim**

- During ear presentation RS applied Sudocrem to the dry ear lobes (awaiting Dermalol delivery) (see figures 8 & 9). Nissim tolerated this to a point but was curious of the smell

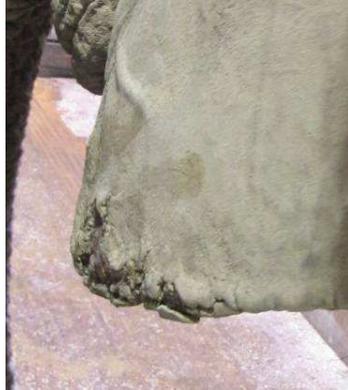


Figure 8: Nissim's Right Ear lobe



Figure 9: Applying Sudocrem

#### 10.6.10

- A full training regime was carried out- foot scrubs and ear presentation. We applied more Sudocrem to Nissim's ear lobes. He is still unsure of this, so we will request 'side' again so his ears are fully presented before application of cream

### **BUTA**

#### 7.6.10

- Buta presented all 4 feet for scrubbing. Buta doesn't put her feet right through the front foot port, hopefully this access will be possible once the stirrup is used. Buta has cracked nails and pad overgrowth (see figures 10 & 11). AR deemed that Buta was relaxed enough to allow keepers to undertake some foot work



Figure 10: Buta's back right foot



Figure 11: Buta's back left foot

- Buta presented her right ear very well and allowed the veins to be pinched. Buta has limited movement of her left ear due to it being folded down, therefore blood draws from this ear would be limited

8.6.10

- AF performed Buta's training session with RS assisting. We showed Jen the full routine- feet scrubbed and ear presentation

9.6.10

- AF performed Butas' training session, all 4 feet scrubbed and ears presented. AR took photographs of Buta's feet and discussed what footcare may be needed.

10.6.10

- A full training session- scrubbed all feet and practiced ear presentation. AR guided AF and SC on how to trim rear foot pads to remove some layered overgrowth. AR trimmed a couple of severely cracked nails on the front feet to remove dead nail tissue, to encourage healthy growth. Buta was very calm through this her first pedicure (see figures 12-15)



**Figure 12: Buta's front right foot pre and post trim**



**Figure 13: Buta's front left foot pre and post trim**



**Figure 14: Buta's back right and back left feet post trim**



**Figure 15: SC trimming Buta's rear pads with a Swiss hoof knife**

## **JUBA**

### **7.6.10**

- Juba presented her front feet well and enthusiastically, allowing a foot scrub. She presented her back feet gently and allowed brushing. AR could see a huge improvement since January when we were only bringing Juba in and out of the facility to get her used to being separated from the herd
- Keepers touched Juba's ears with the target and introduced 'ear' command, to get her used to this

## **SHABA**

#### 7.6.10

- Shaba has been following the head target for a couple of months now but had shown no inclination to lift her feet. She does not show any aggression, curiosity or excitement. AR suggested walking her longer distances along the PC wall to try to catch the foot lift as she was in motion.

#### 8.6.20

- Continued to encourage Shaba to lift her feet. Slight success was seen as Shaba moved onto the head target

#### 9.6.10

- Continued with the same process. Target trainers swapped part way through to see if the change of keeper would keep her alert/ interested. AR introduced the foot target and some foot movement was achieved

#### 10.6.10

- SC trained Shaba before Ashanti today to help keep her attention. Shaba began to lift the foot, AF kept the target under the foot even when Shaba moved away to show her she needs to keep her foot lifted

### ASHANTI

#### 7.6.10

- Ashanti presented her front feet well and allowed a soft brush on them. Keepers highlighted the weakness in Ashanti's right shoulder to AR- a possible break/dislocation from old injury. Ashanti lifts this leg with her body side onto the PC wall due to the limited mobility of this joint.
- Ashanti presented her back feet calmly. She responds well to training, eager and excited (see figure 16)



Figure 16: Ashanti performing front and rear foot lifts

#### 8.6.10

- Ashanti was flighty & distracted today due to extra personnel observing training. Jen observed the session & again we pointed out Ashanti's joint weakness (currently medicated with Bute in the Winter months, & Arthri-Aid daily). Ashanti still moves happily with the herd, can move at speed, climb, dig & wallow
- AR advised keepers to move slowly whilst training Ashanti to calm her excited nature

#### 9.6.10

- Ashanti was calm to begin with and allowed foot scrub. Ashanti was excitable with the back feet and kept missing the port. AR suggested the rear foot trainer move to Ashanti's left side so she can see the keeper before the left foot lift, this seemed to help

#### 10.6.10

- Ashanti was much more settled, allowing a foot scrub of the front feet. She presented the rear feet well on the first attempt. We will aim to scrub all four feet with warm water soon

#### **TOTS AND NALA (mother and calf)**

- Protocol
  - - Trained Shaba and Ashanti
  - - Moved Juba with Shaba & Ashanti, then let these 3 out into the paddock
  - - Moved Buta into the old house
  - - Nissim remained in his night pen

#### 8.6.10

- SC trained Tots and RS trained Nala for the whole week. SC led Tots into the PC pen while RS targeted Nala in the big pen. The gate between the two pens was left fully open so the two elephants knew they were able to reach each other
- Both keepers rewarded the elephant for following them along the wall, and then introduced the head target. Neither elephant was worried by the head target. Encouraged Tots and Nala to respond to 'target' command, but so far it is the keepers that the elephants are following.
- RS took Nala into the pen with her mother, and back out again. Gates were opened to release the elephants to the herd while Tots and Nala were held on target, they did not rush the gates
- The Elephant Team were extremely pleased with how well this session went, with no signs of stress

#### 9.6.10

- We repeated the same procedure to separate Tots and Nala, we practiced moving them along the wall using the head target. We took Nala into the pen with her mother and vice versa, and also swapped the elephants between the pens. Tots seemed slightly worried about where Nala was, but Nala was eager to learn and excited by the whole event.
- Tots rushed slightly to rejoin the herd but Nala was content to eat her fruit reward on target before following her mother

#### 10.6.10

- Again, Tots and Nala were separated and moved along the wall (see figure 17). Encouraged Nala to follow the target and not the keeper. Tots was a little less willing to move around. Both elephants still responding to opening gates, practice will hopefully settle them to stop the gate rushing behaviours



Figure 17: RS with Nala on head target, SC with Tots on head target

### Conclusions

- As a team we are proud of how far we have come in just 8 months, both with training & elephant husbandry. We look to the future to continue this success with all 7 elephants. We are also constantly generating new ideas to improve the elephant facility inside & out: self filling water or drinkers, shower system, 24 hour outdoor access, a new facility with a sand floor, external hay feeders....& many more! A positive & busy future lies ahead.
- During AR's visit we each had a session foot/nail trimming under Alan's supervision, so we could get the feel of the footcare tools. AR demonstrated knife sharpening- required prior to every pedicure. We discussed blood draws from the ears and how to progress training the herd
- Evelyn de Wolf visited from Chester Zoo to observe Buta and Nissim's training sessions. Evelyn praised our efforts and achievements so far
- As a team, with Alan, we updated our document of short & long-term progress & requirements for the facility/team etc, copies have been emailed to P.L & E.P
- P.L visited daily to discuss progress. E.P visited to observe and discuss training
- AR suggested we host a PC conference this year here at KSP, to show people the speed of our learning curve and the transition to PC. We would be able to explain to delegates where we have come from, the stage we have reached now, and our plans for the future with PC, a new house, and hopefully a breeding herd

### Aims:

- We aim to
  - begin blood draws from Nissim and Buta this year
  - perfect foot scrubs for Juba & Ashanti, and also introduce ear presentation
  - encourage Shaba to lift her feet into the foot port
  - teach Nala & Tots to recognize the target, become settled in the training environment, and then to lift their front feet