



ELDERLY ASIAN ELEPHANT HANAKO DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER

Veterinarians at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium are developing a treatment plan

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TACOMA, Wash. – Elderly Asian elephant Hanako, a longtime member of the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium family, recently was diagnosed with cancer in her left front foot.



Hanako sprays herself off with water from the elephant habitat pool at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

The zoo’s veterinarians are consulting with a veterinary oncologist and other specialists to develop a long-term treatment and care plan to delay the progression of Hanako’s cancer and prolong her life.

“We are saddened by this news and will do everything within our power to treat Hanako’s cancer,” Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Deputy Director John Houck said. “We will continue to provide her with a great quality of life for as long as possible.”

Hanako (Han’-a-ko) voluntarily participates in routine daily foot care, presenting her feet to zookeepers for inspection and cleaning.

“Tissue samples from her foot revealed the cancer,” Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Head Veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf said. “The cancer is likely not curable.” Complete surgical removal of the cancer is not possible due to its size, location and the invasion of surrounding tissues, Wolf said.

Hanako, 54 years old, has far surpassed the median life expectancy for a female Asian elephant, which is about 47 years, according to statistics from the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

Hanako is eating her normal diet of mulched Timothy hay and orchard grass in addition to a variety of mixed vegetables and fruits, said Elephant Manager Shannon Smith. Smith has cared for Hanako since the elephant arrived at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in 1997. Hanako particularly enjoys special enrichments, such as watermelons and maple branches.

“Hanako will live out her life at Point Defiance Zoo, her home for the past 21 years, under the expert care of our experienced elephant keepers and veterinarians who know her well,” said Houck.

Smith and the other elephant keepers have developed close relationships with Hanako and Suki, her 53-year-old barn mate, through daily interactions that include care, feeding and a routine of exercises designed to keep the elephants healthy and engaged. Hanako, for example, often takes dips in the pool and then bathes herself with a mixture of mud and water.

Suki, the zoo’s other elderly female Asian elephant, came to Tacoma in 1996. She grew up in a circus and had a history of mistreatment and subsequent aggression. Point Defiance Zoo was a leader in pioneering the use of protected – or restricted – contact and positive reinforcement in elephant care and has a long history of providing a home in which elephants, such as Hanako and Suki, can thrive.

For more information, go to www.pdza.org/elephantcare.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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