



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

5/4/2022

Birmingham Zoo Announces Successful Elephant Tusk Procedure

BIRMINGHAM, AL – The Birmingham Zoo is pleased to report that the tusk removal procedure on our beloved 41-year-old male African elephant, Bulwagi, has been a great success.

Bulwagi had a crack in the side of his one remaining tusk when he arrived at the Birmingham Zoo in 2010. There was an attempt to remove the tusk in 2016 due to complications that could arise if the tusk were to become infected. The Zoo team and outside specialists were unable to remove the tusk at that time, but were able to trim the tusk in such a way to keep it clean and reduce chances of infection.

Over the past few months the crack and the tusk have been changing at an accelerated rate, with pieces breaking off and the decision was made to attempt to remove the tusk again to prevent future health concerns.

A specialized veterinary team of two renowned veterinarians, Professor Gerhard Steenkamp and Dr. Adrian Tordiffe of the University of Pretoria in South Africa, was brought in to perform the tusk procedure. Veterinary and elephant staff from the zoo community from all over the U.S. also attended to lend a helping hand.

"The surgery went great," according to Adam Brooks, Birmingham Zoo Assistant Curator and Elephant Manager. "We were able to remove all of the tusk and Bulwagi recovered incredibly well."

"The procedure was as close to perfect as we could have hoped for," said Birmingham Zoo Director of Animal Health, Dr. Stephanie McCain, DVM, Dipl, ACZM. "Bulwagi did great under anesthesia and we were able to remove the tusk without any issues," she explains. "It was incredible to see our teams and people from other institutions come together to make this procedure a huge success story."

Birmingham Zoo veterinary staff will continue to monitor Bulwagi's recovery and anticipates continued health for this beloved elephant moving forward.

African elephants use their tusks mainly for digging and stripping bark from trees. Each year, at least 20,000 African elephants are illegally killed for their tusks. A resurgence in demand for elephant ivory has fueled this poaching epidemic that continues to steer the species dangerously nearer to extinction.

The Birmingham Zoo is a leader in elephant husbandry and management and is committed to the highest standards of care for all of the animals that call the Zoo home. We are proud of the dedication and commitment of Zoo staff and outside experts towards animal care, and we are grateful to the community for its continued support of the Birmingham Zoo.

“The care we take and the outstanding health of the Zoo’s elephants and other animals is paramount to our mission to inspire passion to conserve the natural world,” said Birmingham Zoo President & CEO Chris Pfefferkorn. “African elephants are endangered and their populations continue to decline in the wild. Your Zoo’s commitment to the conservation of the African elephant and the other species we care for at the Zoo is critical for their continued survival.”

MEDIA CONTACT

Jennifer Ogilvie

Marketing and PR Manager

joilvie@birminghamzoo.com | 205.397.3874

SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook @BirminghamZoo

Twitter @BirminghamZoo

Instagram @bhamzoo

ABOUT THE BIRMINGHAM ZOO

The Birmingham Zoo is an independent, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

OUR MISSION *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World*

Approximately 550 animals of 180 species call the Birmingham Zoo home, including sea lions, zebras, elephants, bongos, and endangered species from six continents. The Birmingham Zoo is the only AZA-accredited zoo in the state of Alabama.

www.birminghamzoo.com | 2630 Cahaba Road | Birmingham, AL 35223

###