THE ASIAN ELEPHANT IN AUSTRALIA

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On a recent visit to Australia, I visited a number of Zoos and looked at the Asian elephants *(Elephas maximus)* there. I made further investigations regarding the Asian elephant and its history in the Zoos and Circuses in Australia. The first record of an Asian elephant in Australia is from the Taronga Zoo in Sydney. The record states that the elephant, named *Jumbo*, arrived from the Calcutta Zoo/King of Siam and died in 1896. There is no record of its sex, date of birth or when it arrived in Sydney. The record which gives both the Calcutta Zoo and the King of Siam as the origin, is confusing. Calcutta and Siam (the present Thailand) are far apart. However nothing is impossible. It is likely that the King of Siam presented this elephant to the Calcutta Zoo or some Potentate in India. The Potentate or the Zoo itself may have in turn gifted or sold the elephant to the Sydney Zoo. Interestingly *Jessie*, a female which was born in 1862, arrived in the Taronga Zoo in Sydney in 1882 and her origin too is again the Calcutta Zoo /King of Siam. Were both elephants sent to the Taronga Zoo at the same time? This is most likely. The Taronga Zoo may have had an idea of breeding these two elephants.

The record shows that the cause of *Jessie's* death was euthanasia on 26 September 1939. *Jessie* would have been 77 years old at the time of her death. Euthanasia may mean that *Jessie* was dying of old age and the authorities decided to put her to sleep. The records of the Adelaide Zoo show that a female named *Miss Siam*, of unknown age, was gifted to it by Mr. T. Elder. It was recieved at the Zoo on the 2nd of January 1884 and lived in the Zoo for 20 years till it died on 7 May 1904. On 27 November that same year the Adelaide Zoo purchased another female named *Mary Anne* from a person whose name was not recorded. This elephant lived for thirty years at the Zoo until its death on 20 January, 1934.

The Taronga Zoo seems to have been, till recently, the entry point for most of the elephants coming into Australia and may have also been the quarantine station. However the first elephant to come to the Adelaide Zoo is not on the Taronga records nor is the second elephant at Adelaide. The records at Taronga show that they have had 22 elephants in their Zoo at sometime or the other. Some of these animals had died and others had been sold mainly to circuses and one to the Ridgeway Zoo in New Zealand. Of the 22 elephants recorded at Taronga, nine have died, five have euthanasia as the cause of death and five have been sold, whilst three are exibited at present.

The Taronga records show that sixteen elephants had been kept there on their way to other Zoos and circuses. The first such elephant at Taronga was in 1930. Its stay at Taronga was only four days. Strangely the elephant had come from Hobart in Tasmania and was sent to the Auckland Zoo in New Zealand. On perusing the records at Taronga the transit elephants had been there for generally a month or so. There are others that had been there up to six months, one elephant up to nine months. It is possible that the Zoos and circuses that these elephants were bound for, were not ready for them. One of the elephants that had come to the Taronga Zoo arrived from the Durban Council in South Africa. What was an Asian elephant doing in South Africa? This may have been an elephant that the Taronga Zoo bought from a circus in South Africa. Most of the elephants in Australia seem to have come through animal suppliers and circuses. Mayfield Kennels, later known as Eurasia Exporters, have supplied the most number of elephants for the Taronga Zoo and the other destinations via Taronga.

The Perth Zoo has four Asian elephants at present. The first, *Tricia* was born in 1957 and obtained by the Zoo from Mayfield Kennels on 23 January 1963. On 15 December 1963 another three were imported from Malaysia. All three named *Silup, Siput* and *Chepam*, were born in 1989. The Auckland Zoo in New Zealand had two Asian cow elephants in 1992. *Kashin* was twenty three years old and has now been at Auckland for nearly twenty five years. She had come from a Zoo in the USA but had been caught in the jungles of Thailand. The other female was named *Burma* and was brought there in January 1990. The Zoos that have had Asian elephants are Taronga Zoo in Sydney, Royal Melbourne Zoo, Perth Zoological Gardens and Auckland Zoo in New Zealand, The Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo, New South Wales has three African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*). The Asian elephant at the Monarto Zoo, in South Australia, died in October 1994. The Australian Species Management Programme (ASMP) has decided to concentrate on the mainland Asian sub species *(Elephas maximus indicus).*

At the Melbourne Zoo the elephants are not worked at all. They are primarily for display and are housed in an enclosure with a dry moat. There is a similar arrangement at the Taronga Zoo. At Melbourne the elephants are not chained at night or at any other time. They spend the nights in a large barn. The female is handled freely and under protection whilst the male is handled always under protection. An elephant restraint chute, which is a corral that restricts the free movement of the animal, is used. This helps in veterinary attention, blood sampling and foot care.

It does not look as if any of the Zoos have a serious breeding programme for their elephants. The animals have been mainly for exibition. There is no record of any elephant breeding in Australia, either the Asian species or the African. However with the ASMP it seems that some Zoos intend going in for a serious breeding programme. The Perth Zoo has obtained young elephants from Malaysia, and the Melbourne Zoo which has an Asian male and female at present, is also on the lookout for young females.

Table 1. Number of elephants in Australian Zoos

Name of Zoo	*Males*	*Females*	*Total*	*Remarks*
Taronga	1	2	3	*seking three elephants from Malaysia*
Dubbo	1(Af)	2(Af)	3	*has only African species. Plans to breed them*
Melbourne	1	1	2	*seeking females Asian elephants*
Adelaide	0	0	0	*no plans for elephants at the moment*
Monarto	0	0	0	*plans to get a young group of Asian elephants*
Perth	1	3	4	*plans to breed elephants*
Auckland (New Zealand)	0	2	2	*needs a male elephant*

Af = African elephant
Source: (Chandima de Alwis, Curator of Mammals, Royal Melbourne Zoo)