

Miscellaneous

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Commits \$180,000 to Smithsonian's National Zoo to Continue Critical Elephant Herpes Research

Ringling Bros. Funding Will Support Search for Cure to Single Largest Threat to the Endangered Asian Elephant

Vienna, VA, (July 25, 2005) -- *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey*®, today announced it will fund ongoing research on endotheliotropic herpes viruses (EEHV) being conducted by the National Elephant Herpesvirus Laboratory at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoological Park. The \$180,000 gift will be distributed over the next three years to support the National Zoo's efforts toward treating, and ultimately curing, this typically fatal disease in young Asian elephants. The gift reflects *Ringling Bros.*' commitment to the survival and well-being of the endangered Asian elephant.

EEHV is the single greatest health threat to the Asian elephant today. Only four known elephants have survived the disease, one of which is a *Ringling Bros.* elephant currently residing at the *Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation*, a 200-acre facility in central Florida dedicated to the reproduction, study and retirement of Asian elephants. The National Zoo's EEHV lab is the only facility in North America that tests for the disease. EEHV infects only elephants and usually has a fatal outcome within a week of onset of symptoms, which include head and neck swelling, tongue cyanosis and lethargy. Elephants with EEHV symptoms are immediately started on famciclovir (an anti-herpes drug used in humans) to increase their chance of survival.

"As a partner in the fight to preserve the endangered Asian elephant, we applaud the National Zoo for its work in protecting this magnificent species from this deadly virus," said Bruce Read, Vice President of Animal Stewardship for *Ringling Bros.* "We hope that our donation will ensure the continued existence of the zoo's EEHV lab and the critical research and testing that will someday lead to the eradication of this disease."

In 1995, pathologists at the National Zoo were the first to identify EEHV while investigating the sudden death of a 16-month-old Asian elephant born at the zoo. The zoo's EEHV lab tests blood samples from symptomatic elephants to confirm they are suffering from the disease. Additionally, the lab is currently developing a test called Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) that will help identify at risk elephants.

"The research and services provided by the National Elephant Herpesvirus Laboratory at the Smithsonian's

National Zoo are a critical component to the collective efforts of the elephant community for the preservation of these endangered species," said Dr. Laura Richman, former pathology resident and National Zoo research associate, who founded the EEHV lab. "It is our hope that the lab will generate meaningful diagnostic and epidemiologic data that will help curtail illness and deaths attributable to the virus."

Young Asian elephants are especially vulnerable to EEHV, as about half the deaths of young elephants in captivity are attributed to the disease. The only clear risk factor currently identified for Asian elephants is exposure to African elephants, although infection is not limited to this factor.

"There is more research that needs to be done in order to develop effective medical treatments for EEHV," said Mike Keele, Chair of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association Elephant Species Survival Program and Deputy Director of the Oregon Zoo. "Unlike many groups that claim they care deeply about elephants, *Ringling Bros.* is making a major resource commitment to improve their lives while in our care. *Ringling Bros.*' generosity is an example of cooperative efforts that can truly make a difference for elephants worldwide."

