

Toronto Zoo no place for elephants

In his column 'Not sold on moving elephants?' (Oct. 24, 2013), Bill Rea cannot understand why shipping the Toronto elephants (Iringa, Toka and Thika) to California is advantageous.

The reason is because he is not thinking about the needs of the elephants. While Rea's cat from the animal shelter may now lead a life of luxury, as he suggests in his article, that can hardly compare to the needs of an elephant.

I am not a zoologist, nor am I an expert on elephants and their behavior. I have however, had the awesome experience to travel to Kenya this past summer and observe elephants in their natural habitat. I can tell you, with certainty, from my observations in that beautiful country, that the Toronto Zoo, try as it might, is no place for three fully grown elephants. The dozens of elephants we saw in the Maasai Mara in Kenya were all in family groupings. They socialized with each other and stayed close to each other as we watched from our jeep. They ran, wallowed in the mud, tore branches from trees, explored, ate grass, and yet never strayed too far from their family. Elephants are very social and intelligent animals - this was easy to see from their behaviour in the wild.

Many animals in zoos are ambassadors for their species. They allow people to see different animals and learn about them. They inspire us to be more aware of the environment and how our actions affect animal habitats.

The three Toronto elephants arrived safely this past week at the elephant sanctuary (PAWS) in California and by all accounts are doing well. The sanctuary will provide the social, physical, emotional and mental well being that these amazing animals deserve.

The Toronto Zoo is a great facility with many interesting displays of animals - it's just not a great place for elephants.

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