



MEDIA RELEASE

Enquiries : Glynis Vaughan, Zimbabwe National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals,
(ZNSPCA) + 263 4 497574 Email znsPCA@zol.co.zw, zimnspcahq@zol.co.zw

ZNSPCA – Statement of Fact Regarding the Rescue and Relocation of Nine Elephants

The Zimbabwe National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ZNSPCA) would like to set the record straight regarding the recent elephant rescue project in which nine elephants were rescued and translocated from an elephant training ranch to Hwange National Park.

In April 2009, ZNSPCA discovered 10 African elephants on a ranch in West Nicholson that had been captured from the wild for the purpose of training for elephant back safaris. The elephants had been captured in October 2008 from Dubane Ranch in Matabeleland South.

Due to the evidence of cruelty involved in this training process submitted by ZNSPCA Inspectors, the Honourable Minister of Environment and Tourism, Francis Nhema, ordered the elephants to be released and all training to be stopped.

In June 2009 one elephant, known as Dumasani who was five years old died.

The opinions of renowned Elephant Scientist Dr. Joyce Poole were sought and she confirmed that after substantial rehabilitation, the abused elephants should be able to be released into the wild. Dr. Poole's input into this matter has been ongoing.

After negotiations by ZNSPCA with the ranch owner, it was agreed that the elephants would be rehabilitated and released back into the wild. In July 2009, ZNSPCA approached the Vier Pforten (Four Paws) organisation for financial assistance to care for the elephants, as they were considering establishing a rehabilitation and release sanctuary within Zimbabwe. In August 2009, Vier Pforten staff and volunteers teamed up with the ZNSPCA to assist in caring for and rehabilitating the nine elephants. Vier Pforten contracted wildlife rehabilitator Karen Trendler, who had assisted the ZNSPCA with the initial report on the abused elephants, to work with the team to rehabilitate the animals.

ZNSPCA approached Zimbabwe National Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (NPWMA) regarding the abuse of these animals in order to prevent further cases of this nature from occurring. NPWMA agreed that stricter controls needed to be implemented in order to stop the capture of wild elephants for commercial use and NPWMA granted the ZNSPCA permission to move the elephants to Hwange National Park where they could live out their lives as wild animals.

ZNSPCA approached Conservation Solutions (a wildlife capture company) and requested them to move the elephants. Conservation Solutions assisted the ZNSPCA by fundraising for this move as well as other expenses incurred by the rescued animals. After reviewing the project, the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) agreed to sponsor the relocation costs of the elephants. On the day of the move, the owner of the ranch read a press statement that was issued and insisted that IFAW pull out of the project.

Faced by the real possibility that the owner of the ranch would prevent the elephants being removed from the property, IFAW agreed to withdraw from the relocation and removed all personnel from assisting in the rescue. Their funding to pay for the relocation remains in place.

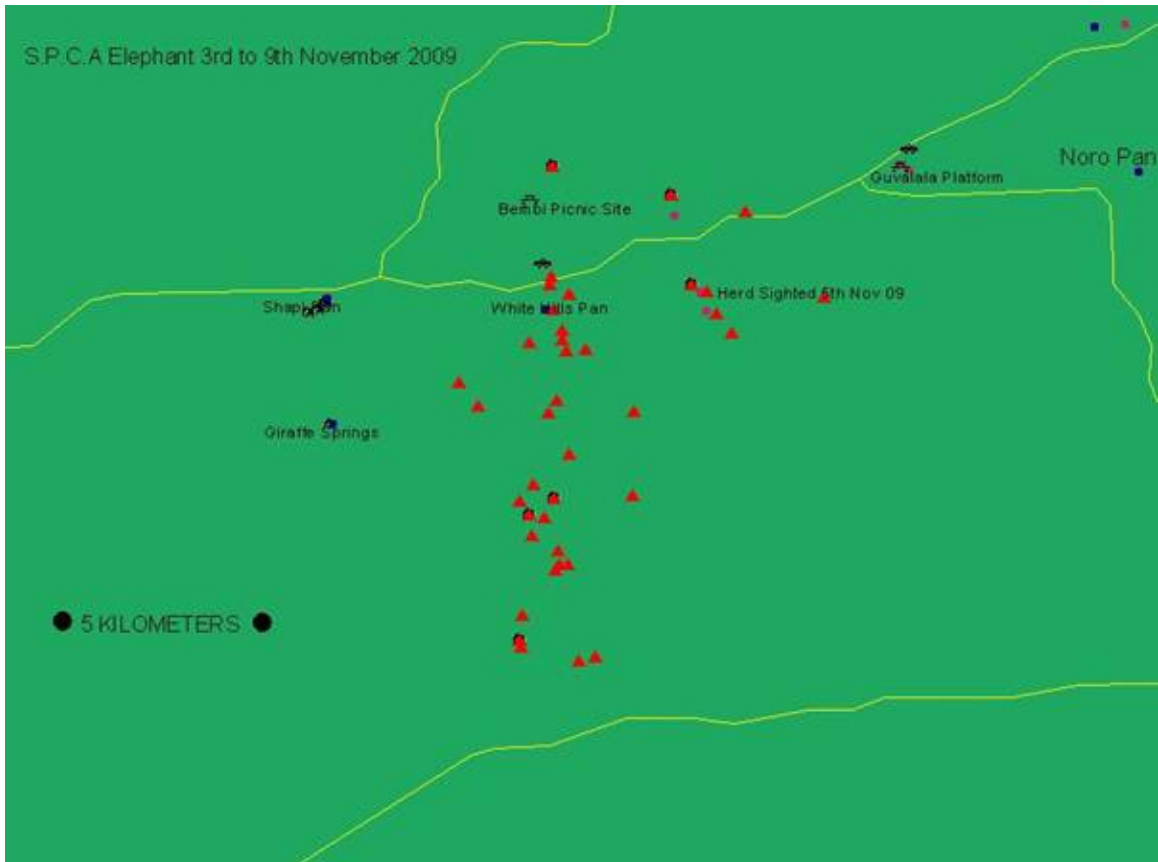
Conservation Solutions darted the elephants, fitted a satellite collar (with the assistance of Roger Parry from Wild Horizons Trust) on the oldest female elephant (Mary) and microchipped all the animals. Dr. Andre Uys from Conservation Solutions was the veterinarian in charge of the animals. The Micro chips were kindly donated by Identipet SA. Elephants without Borders donated two expired collars which considerably reduced the cost of Mary's collar.

The elephants were successfully moved by Conservation Solutions to Hwange National Parks escorted by National Parks Senior Ecologist Rose Mandisodza and ZNSPCA Inspectors, where they were released off the transport truck into the wild. Facilitated by National Parks Warden Arthur Musakwa, the first sighting of the elephants was two days after their release and the small group were still together, showing no repercussions from their long journey and behaving like normal wild elephants.

Post release monitoring of this group will be conducted by National Parks and Wildlife Officials with the assistance of ZNSPCA. As the ZNSPCA have few personnel and are inexperienced in this field, we have approached Wild Horizons Trust and Elephants Without Borders to assist National Parks with the post release monitoring. Wildlife Specialist, Karen Trendler will also play an integral role in this process as she successfully rehabilitated the traumatised elephants. This case has huge scientific significance for other projects of similar nature world wide.

Without the dedication of the Vier Pfofen staff and volunteers over the last three months, and the donations received by numerous individuals and companies, and the advice of elephant scientist Joyce Poole the freedom of these elephants would not have been secured. For many years the ZNSPCA has relied on the support of National Council of SPCA in South Africa and its' member Societies, and we thank them for that support which enabled ZNSPCA to keep open and deal with cases such as this one. Thank you to all our supporters and sponsors for their assistance.

Below is a map showing the movement of Mary and her small group in the last few days. The group has stayed within a 10km radius of the release site. Further updates of the “wild” elephants will follow.



Glynis Vaughan
Chief Inspector
ZNSPCA
156 Enterprise Road, Chisipite, Harare, Zimbabwe
P O Box CH55, Chisipite, Harare, Zimbabwe
Phone: +263 4 497574
Fax: +263 4 497885