



## Expert statement Dr. Rinku Gohain on elephants Rani and Carla from Circus Renz Berlin

Dr. Rinku Gohain is an elephant veterinarian from Assam, India who acquired both his Bachelor of Veterinary Science and Master in Veterinary Surgery and Radiology degrees from the College of Veterinary Science, Assam Agricultural University, India. Dr. Gohain also conducted research on elephant anesthesia. The title of his master's degree research being 'Medetomidine and Medetomidine-Ketamine induced immobilization and its reversal by Atipamezole in Asian Elephants', under the guidance of professors Dr. Bhupen Sarma and two times Assam State Government wildlife awardee Dr. Bijoy Dutta as his co-guide. Dr. Gohain started his experience with elephants since he was an undergraduate veterinary student and under the mentorship of renowned pioneer of elephant veterinary services of yester times (late) Dr. S.C Pathak. Dr. Gohain has around thirteen years of experience in both wild and captive elephants in his country and abroad. Dr. Gohain is an expert on Asian elephants and advocates both for the mental and physical well-being of elephants. He is a staunch supporter of 'positive reinforcement training for veterinary care of captive elephants in both open and closed contact system of management'. Dr. Gohain has previously worked as a Veterinarian for the International Fund for Animal Welfare funded Wildlife Trust of India and as the Veterinary consultant for Save Elephant Foundation, Elephant Nature Park, Chiangmai, Thailand. He has also worked as a Veterinarian and behaviorist on a month long project for elephants in Southern and Eastern India along with Elke Riesterer, a massage therapist for a Kerulos Center Project in 2008. At present he is on his dream mission to start an Elephant Hospital with proper diagnostic and mobile veterinary unit in Assam, India to be able to provide standard veterinary services for elephants of the whole of North Eastern India along with different elephant experts of this region.

Based on the photographs of the two elephants provided to him for his expert opinion, Dr. Gohain states:

"The overall condition of the elephants is very pathetic. Both the elephants have a dull appearance and mentally given-up looks." "Elephants are normally busy in their own world of activities, very fun loving, highly social, intelligent and individual characters just like us".

"As seen in the pictures, one of the elephant's left eye has either a corneal opacity or a corneal scar so partial or full blindness is possible on this eye. Cataract is a problem of the eye lens so this eye may or

may not have cataract but definitely seems to have an opacity. To explain extent of blindness (partial of full blindness) and whether cataract is present or not, close-up examination will have to be carried out. Elephants are often hit on the eyes as a means to inflict tremendous pain and impose terrible fear to be able control them or make them obey to the commands of the handler. It may not be possible to examine for cataract without treatment of the opaqueness of the cornea at first. The only humane way for proper examination of the eye is 'positive reinforcement training' to build up trust among the elephant, the handler and the veterinarian. For this knowledge, patience and dedication is extremely important. The close up pictures of the eye says that there is a possibility of 100% blindness on the left eye." Though elephants normally have poor eye vision and can manage their everyday life in captivity without any eye sight, it will still be an absurd excuse to intentionally mishandle an elephant to the extent of causing blindness just for the sake of controlling. Vision may be poor but eyes are eyes and are very sensitive in all beings".

"There is a vertical crack on one nail of one left foot and an improper attempt might have been made to do foot work on another nail of the same foot, however there seems to be also some muddy material on it. There is podo-dermatitis with nail abscess on another nail. There is feathering of the cuticle of all the feet in both elephants which is extremely painful. None of the elephants are sweating around their nails which means there is severe skin problem around their nails and very high possibility of dehydration." "The chalky white on the feet most commonly occur due to problems in the urinary system which may lead to formation of urinary calculi. Diagnosis of urinary calculi is difficult in elephants and on many occasions have caused death for not being able to diagnose and provide adequate treatment. The root cause for such chalky material seen in elephants is mostly due to dehydration caused by not providing sufficient drinking water and adequate exercise. However sometimes, rarely, there is a possibility of chalky material of the barn floor getting on to the feet, here most unlikely, because the overall skin condition of the whole body of the elephants is very dry and both the elephants are extremely dehydrated."

"Because of these reasons there is very high possibility for the elephants to also have skin fungal infections. The light colored area on the left rib cage region, at the point of the hip, at the shoulder and behind the eyes indicates that the elephant is let to sleep on very hard surfaces."

"There is also high possibility that these elephants are not being able to carry out their normal self-grooming of dusting, mud splashing on their own body or adequate bathing. And at times the elephants also had in-adequate exposure to sunlight which is very important for the body, however, complete confinement in indoors would cause further and severe health issues which is not the case here".

"One of the elephants is younger and the other is old. The elephant in which the labia is showing is very old. Sagging of labia is sometimes seen in middle aged female elephants as developed anatomical defect, in old age, fungal or mixed infections of the labia, sometimes after calving or labial edema indicating unhealthy state or as remnant after regression of labial edema."

"In addition one particular elephant (most likely the older one) either does not have its full sets of teeth or has one or two eroded ones as per the appearance of the mouth region. The temporal fossa is sunken

and is not full, no tail hairs, depigmentation of the ear extremities all indicating old age. The performing elephant is definitely the older one.”

“The wound behind the eye on the ear fold is an abscess with pus and blood mixed discharge most likely caused due to poking with a sharp instrument to impose pain and fear and make the elephant obey and the wound has not been properly or adequately treated.”

“The hind leg has on the upper side an old scar made by tightly tied rope or chain or from tremendous self-pull to free itself and the lower one the likely scar of a laceration.”

“All this information is adequate enough to understand that proper care and management of these two elephants is not being carried out as the way it should be done and keeping in view these observations all necessary arrangements should be made for proper care of these elephants”.

Dr. Rinku Gohain