Our Growing Herd
Learning New Languages

As of our last newsletter, Bambi had just arrived and our sanctuary world changed quickly when she joined us. Every new elephant inevitably shifts the dynamic of the whole herd. Bambi charged onto new ground and shook things up right away.

When Bambi first arrived at sanctuary, Mara and Rana had a strong bond and Maia was spending time sharing the larger yards with them. Lady, as always, was dependable Lady - comfortable in a big yard with Mara and Rana, as long as they respected her 15-yard perimeter bubble. Bambi took immediate interest in Mara, and Mara learned quickly that she could control the eager new arrival with just a few squeaks. This amused Mara for a few weeks, but Bambi’s high energy perhaps became a bit too much to handle after the novelty wore off.

Though Bambi quickly bonded with Mara, things changed a few weeks in. During one of their feeds, Bambi was standing off to the side of the yard, with Mara and Rana at the opposite end. Based on their behaviors and Bambi’s quiet presentation, we assumed that something happened between them. Bambi’s puppy-like eagerness pushed some boundaries at the beginning, but never with significant impact. This, however, caused a rift in her friendship with Mara, sending Bambi off to be alone for a bit.

After a couple of self-imposed weeks on her own, Bambi regained interest in the other girls. We decided that some yard time with our patient teacher Rana would help Bambi learn more about how to better live within a herd. When we eventually reintroduced her to the others, Bambi was much more watchful of where Mara was both physically and emotionally. Mara, Bambi, and Rana now spend a great deal of time together, bringing balance to the threesome.

Maia doesn’t spend as much time with Rana and Mara as she once did, perhaps because the bond between Mara, Bambi, and Rana has become more close. She seems to be unsure of Bambi, although this reservation is new. For the first time, Maia has become a bit...
Dear Friends,

Many of you regularly thank us for taking time to share the girls’ stories. For us, it is part of our obligation to them, to share the varying levels of healing they experience. It would be easy to paint a perfectly rosy picture of sanctuary, but that would take away from the reality of what we, as a species, have done to elephants in captivity, their level of suffering, and also the unrelenting resilience that allows them to trust again and heal after decades of a life that would make most of us crumble.

In turn, we want to thank you for taking the time to read in-depth posts, for opening your heart to the girls, getting to know them, identifying with their struggles, and sharing part of yourselves with them. Their healing is universal and most of us can identify with some aspect of one or more of them. This feeling of unity and empathy is all part of fostering their healing – and each of ours.

Sanctuary journeys are not easy for any of us. The same is true in life. Although the elephants sometimes make it seem effortless, the girls put in a lot of work to find their ways through their dark pasts. They are an inspiration in forgiveness, starting over, and vulnerability. Thank you for seeing those qualities in them and for helping to create the space that allows them to finally find peace.

In these not-so-easy times, please stay safe and try to respect everyone’s individual journeys and struggles. If the girls have taught us anything, it’s that knowing you’re not alone can sometimes help you get through the longest of days.

Scott and Kat Blais, GSE Co-Founders
Mara’s Health

Mara arrived at sanctuary in the most dramatic of ways, but she has added an element to our group that we never knew was missing. From her first steps out of the crate, she has embraced every element of her environment and has built deep relationships with the other elephants. She truly has Bambi and Rana wrapped around her metaphorical finger - and they love it. An elephant who once hated water now loves splashing in the pond. Mara has found incredible joy in living life on her own terms for the first time.

But because she has faced physical challenges we may never know the details of, she continues to struggle with gastrointestinal issues. We were aware of some prior incidents of colic, but her current situation is much more complicated than that. It is very difficult to diagnose illnesses like the one we see with Mara. Elephants are too big for procedures like CT scans or MRIs; ultrasounds just can’t permeate to the depth needed to examine the stomach or intestines. So, we are left with basic testing, and a trial and error approach. We have worked closely with experts from around the world and looked at her symptoms in various ways. There simply is no definitive diagnosis and there likely never will be.

She is very picky, but also quirky and smart, so she seems to sense any attempt we make to put oral medicine in her food; any change in texture, smell, or vibration and she will toss even the sweetest and most delicious foods away. If Mara uncovers our efforts, she will stop eating that food altogether - so we give her pain medicine via injection, which she doesn’t seem to mind much. We will not give up in our efforts to find ways to increase her health and happiness every day.

Recently, she reached a reasonable level of food consumption, better than we’d seen since the decline began in August of 2020, but not normal for most elephants. Her appetite will diminish and then rebound with no consistent triggering event.

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The Growing Herd, continued from page 1

of an outsider. While we can’t know exactly why she feels this way, Maia has significant insecurities and we will let the group’s relationships evolve naturally. Right now she will share the big yards with them, but often stays off on her own.

During all of this, Lady was doing typical Lady things. At the moment, she is having a difficult time with her front right foot - but nothing as bad as what we saw before she arrived. She walks more quickly, there is no swelling and she continues to enjoy her essential oil massages and foot soaks. Her left front limb remains stiff at times, worsening on days she overcompensates due to her feet.

As for social behavior, Lady is sometimes overwhelmed by the boisterous Bambi. The energy of Rana, Mara, and Bambi together is a bit much for her, on certain days. But, Lady has moved from completely avoiding their gatherings, to occasionally wandering over just to watch and listen to them. She is clearly making an effort. Her comfort is growing and she is gradually becoming more at ease in the vicinity of their intensity.

We will continue to take cues from Lady. She is currently content with staying in the yards close to the barn, while occasionally sharing fence time with Maia. Having the safety of a barrier between them provides security that some elephants need. Because no elephant’s healing is linear, we can’t predict the path each will take when adjusting to a new space and new personalities. Our goal is to keep a positive approach, but the elephants will always have the final say on how the socialization process will go.
If you’ve been following Pocha and Guillermina’s journey to sanctuary, you’ve seen our Protected Contact Positive Reinforcement Trainers, Karissa and Chrissy, working on enrichment for the elephants. You might wonder why these two elephants need so much of it, but our sanctuary residents do not. One of the main purposes of enrichment is to mimic a species’ natural life and behavior, something that is foreign to most captive elephants. Our trainers work on mental stimulation, which helps with boredom and starts to “wake up their brains.” The hope is that those activities will help them re-engage with the world around them and prepare them for the freedom that awaits. Luckily, it takes most elephants very little time to acclimate once they arrive. When they join us, there is no need to mimic what happens in nature because it is all here.

Pocha and Guillermina have been in our thoughts for so long that it’s hard to believe they will be here soon. What we are learning about them - their personalities, quirks, likes and dislikes - will become real to us. Though we are excited to see their first moments at sanctuary, we know there may be challenges along the way. That means that our team must be prepared and also expect the unexpected.

All of the other elephants we have welcomed have some history of travel; even if they were first transported at a young age, there is some small memory of what that sensation was like. With Guillermina, we are facing a first: an elephant who has never been moved from the spot where she was born. This means we will have to be extra sensitive and as flexible as we can, taking into account the confusion and fear she might initially experience because she has been so sheltered.

There is another great unknown: how will Guillermina respond to being separated from her mother for the first time? For safety reasons, Pocha and Guillermina will be transported in separate containers. We are mindful of that issue and will keep both relatively close during travel. There are portals in the transport containers that can be opened and mother and daughter can communicate and even smell one another at stops along the road. Their bond extends beyond spatial limitations and we have great hopes this will ease temporary separation anxiety. Our elephant caravan will make extra stops to allow the two to reconnect and, hopefully, relax.

It is such a relief to have reached these final steps toward sanctuary. Both ladies are polishing their more complex training behaviors before they begin the 30-day quarantine that precedes their transport. In fact, by the time you read this, Pocha and Guillermina may already be here! No matter the timeline, one thing is certain: Guillermina will be able to live a life she literally could never have imagined and Pocha will be there to guide her along the way.
IT’S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

We think it’s a modern miracle that individuals from 72 countries around the world can collectively, virtually, join together to care for creatures in need of help.

Our work on behalf of captive elephants offers an online gathering place for the humans who value the dignity of animals and extraordinary qualities of elephants. It feels clear from your comments and emails that there are an awful lot of great people around the world that we would like to meet.

We hear often from people who tell us how great it is that we are engaged in the work we are doing. What people don’t understand is just how much our supporters mean to us. You are truly the heart of the organization. Spread around the globe, joining us in caring, in lifting up the creatures who have been treated unfairly by the world, you represent the best of humanity, the compassion that is accessible to us all but often is overlooked in our all-too-busy society. We wanted to take a moment to say thank you.

Whether you are able to give $10 or $10,000, whether you can sustain our work through a monthly gift we can rely on or if you give us the gift of your attention each day, we want you to know that you mean the world to us.

We are grateful you are with us on this journey.

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TRULY GLOBAL

GSE SUPPORTERS REPRESENT 72 COUNTRIES

Thank You

YOUR LETTERS MEAN SO MUCH TO US

Thank You for Sharing

My wife is recovering from visual loss after suffering a stroke 4 weeks ago (she feels she has a kindred spirit in Bambi now). She wants you to know that she insists on following you every day and has not missed a blog even when in hospital. Sending melons to Mara…..enjoy many, darling girl.

Much love from us both

~X

Dear GSE,

The entire sanctuary team is such an inspiration. As a survivor of years of trauma, it brings me great hope and healing and joy and strength to see the constant devotion and selfless love that is freely given each day to your elephants and all the rescue animal family. I wanted to personally thank you for showing the good that humans can do in the tumultuous world.

~ GSE Supporter

Bambi Blooms, continued from page 3

In order to nurture her relationship with Mara back to a healthy place, we decided that some yard time with our patient teacher Rana would help Bambi learn more about how to better live within a herd. Bambi learned etiquette and how to better read elephants, seeing that life has more than just one speed and everyone needs some space at times. Rana is a gentle teacher, but can be firm enough to show that there must be some give and take. There was never any pushing or any negative interaction, but you could see as days went by that Bambi was beginning to get an understanding of the complexities of what it means to live as a group, have a friend, and be a friend. As a result of this time together, Rana built a relationship with Bambi that remains solid.

Seeing Bambi’s progress, we decided to try to reintroduce her back to Mara in gentle ways. Mara wasn’t interested at first and so we introduced all three of them back to each other in one of the larger yards. Rana taught her well and Bambi became more watchful of where Mara was, both physically and emotionally. Instead of bounding over, she approached more slowly with ears out and looked for any negative response before getting too close. She was taking the needs and desires of the others into account before her own.

We now see a balance between Bambi, Mara, and Rana that continues to grow stronger. They understand one another much better and have created a unique friendship that has given the sanctuary a new energy. They often bring fun and silliness wherever they go. We know that the arrival of new elephants can change the dynamics of the entire herd, but the strong bond that they’ve created reflects the ups and downs and, ultimately, the freedom of choice that sanctuary provides.
KENYA AND TAMY

Pocha and Guillermina are well on their way to their new home at ESB, but we continue to work on bringing the other two Mendoza elephants to sanctuary as well. We hope you know that they are never forgotten and our team members are working on training, permits, and every other complicated element rescue requires.

Kenya is next in line for transport, because we have enough of a proper habitat completed for her. She will be our first African elephant, but will not be alone for long, since Pupy and Kuky will follow. As we continue to build space for them, our family of African elephants will continue to grow and learn what it means to experience freedom of choice.

Because of Kenya’s past training with Karissa, she may only need a refresher before the required 30-day quarantine and then transport. Kenya is eager to please and likes being able to show you what she can do, so she’s a total rockstar.

Tamy’s rescue will take longer because we must build an entire Asian male barn and habitat, which involves significant fundraising. We know many of you worry about Tamy and certainly it is not ideal for him to lose the indirect companionship of Pocha and Guillermina. But, currently Kenya is not too far away and they will be able to communicate vocally and through low-frequency vibrations. The most important thing to remember is that once Pocha and Guillermina have been transported, Tamy will gain access to their former space, allowing him to begin training. His current enclosure makes that impossible. Tamy is charming with his tiny ears and nautical temperament, but he displays aggressive behaviors, which is not unusual for elephants who’ve been misunderstood for most of their lifetimes. It will be good for Tamy to have more attention, stimulation, and people time; this will help him understand that positive relationships between elephants and humans are possible.

BRINGING THEM HOME

GSE was introduced to the Mendoza elephants several years ago, and since then, it has been our mission to bring all four of them to sanctuary. Pocha and Guillermina are coming first and Kenya is next, since her habitat is almost ready. Tamy still needs your support to get to sanctuary. Male habitats need stronger fencing, so his enclosure will cost more than our female habitats, but we have a head start with funding. Thanks to two private donors and fundraising efforts by our partner organization ESB, $160,000 has already been raised. While this is a phenomenal beginning, we still need to raise an additional $317,000 to rescue Tamy.

Please Help
Your gift will build a home for the boys

TAMMY
First in line!

Our female elephants experience freedom every day. Tamy, and other male elephants in captivity, are equally deserving. They need your help to enjoy a better life.

WWW.GLOBALELEPHANTS.ORG/TAMYSTOMORROWS/
Mara’s Health, continued from page 3

In general, ESB is fighting an uphill battle when it comes to elephant health. The population of elephants in South America is older than in other parts of the world. We don’t receive young and healthy elephants, and most of our girls have faced lifelong issues with infirmity. Captive elephants frequently have problems with feet and joints and rarely have been fed a natural diet, which can lead to digestive issues, liver and kidney disease, and tooth overgrowth. The smallest seeming problem can cascade into much larger issues with age.

It is an honor for us to provide Mara the extra attention and time she needs. She may be sick, but that doesn’t mean that she is not happy. At night, when we hear her rumble and squeak fests with Rana and Bambi, we are certain every bit of effort is worth it.