



Hello and welcome to the Global Sanctuary for Elephants' podcast, Global Rumbings. Global Sanctuary for Elephants, or GSE for short, is a nonprofit organization with a mission to create vast, safe spaces for captive elephants where they are able to heal physically and emotionally, often from very traumatic pasts. I'm your host, Nadia Mari, and I'll be taking you to the lush jungle of the Mato Grosso region in central Brazil, home of GSE's initial project, Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, currently home to six female Asian elephants, lovingly referred to as the girls.

Nadia: 00:49

Hi and welcome to the next episode of Global Rumbings. Today, we're going to take a break from the often very entertaining journey around Brazil with Kat and Scott looking for suitable properties. And we are going to be talking about, more about elephants and why it is so important for sanctuary. We talked about face value trauma, about the depth of recovery, about elephants' resilience, but the work at TES and also the work in Brazil is just showing why sanctuary is needed for captive elephants. So without further delay, let's head off down to Brazil. Hi, Kat. Hi, Scott.

Kat: 01:28

Hey, Nadia.

Scott: 01:29

Hey, Nadia. How are you today?

Nadia: 01:30

I'm fine. It's spring here in Europe. The days are getting longer. The temperatures are rising. So life is good.

Scott: 01:38

Very good. Our temperatures are always rising. I shouldn't say that; it's actually pretty warm today as we go into our fall. Spring and fall for us here are actually our hottest times of year. So we're getting more sun, but also high humidity. So it's a little bit warm these days, but beautiful.

Nadia: 01:56

So is it still rain season then?

Scott: 01:58

Oh yeah, Hopefully we still have a few more months. Looking out past the sanctuary, there's a storm over to the east, so we'll probably get some more rain this afternoon, hopefully.

Nadia: 02:07

So this week we are not going to be traveling around Brazil. So all the listeners who are hoping to hear about the exciting and probably very funny story about you living behind a fish house (Kat and Scott laugh) will have to wait until the next episode because today we are going to be talking about elephants, which is what your work and what this podcast is about.

Scott: 02:27

I appreciate that you said that it was an entertaining journey. (Nadia laughs) In the moment, I don't know that it was so entertaining. It is a little bit looking back on it.

Kat: 02:37

We definitely laughed throughout (Scott laughs) and, if we weren't laughing throughout, we never would have gotten to this point.

Scott: 02:43

Sometimes. Very frustrating but, yeah, entertaining.

Nadia: 02:46

I think, as we said before, looking back, most things always are, yeah, a little bit nicer and a little bit more fun and not as bad. But yeah, we'll go back to the mouse dung house and things that maybe wasn't particularly funny. Episode three, I was listening to it while we were to prepare for today, and there was so much, so much in there about elephants. It is just, is just fascinating.

And you talked a lot about face value trauma when you had your elephants when they came to the sanctuary in Tennessee but, presumably, obviously also your sanctuary in Brazil. So can you explain to us what is face value trauma? What did you see?

Scott: 03:29

I think when talking about face value trauma, we're talking about the trauma that everybody knows, that everyone talks about. What it means to be confined and on chains. And you see the stereotypical actions: the bobbing and swaying, the frustration, aggression, disgruntled actions. But that trauma, the manifestation of those behaviors that are the manifestation of the trauma, are still relatively superficial compared to the more internal suffering.

Yes, they are... Sorry, trying to find the right words to say this because it is complex in it's, in it's evolution for the elephants' recovery. But trauma has multiple layers to it, as we all know. And sometimes, you know, the superficial frustration, it can manifest as aggression or manifest into the, you know, the swaying. But there's different layers of that stereotypical action as well. You know, and it's not just an elephant swaying its head. It's, it's, you can see... Let's go back to Guida and Maia. When you saw both of them, Guida was swaying.

Guida - the first two elephants that came to Elephant Sanctuary Brazil. And forgive me, I don't remember if we introduced them at all yet or not.

Nadia: 04:47

Not yet.

Scott: 04:47

But they're the first two that came to Elephant Sanctuary Brazil and the first time Kat and I saw them, which were on different trips down to the southern part of Brazil. Guida was entranced in her swaying. It wasn't just swaying.

Kat: 05:01

No, she was, I mean, she just seemed like she was gone. You would watch her and she would - most elephants, they sway at points and they stop. Like when there's stimulation, they can be distracted from the stereotypical behavior and they stop. But Guida would eat and sway. People would approach her and touch her, and she continued to sway. I mean, she was just so deep within herself that we had concerns about, we actually came up with all these plans about how we were going to get her to kind of reconnect with the world around her and come back from that place she had gone so deep within as a way of dealing with the situation that she was in, and just making it so that she could get through each day.

Scott: 05:50

And if you want to keep hearing about that, you're going to have to tune in to several episodes in front when we talk about Guida. (Kat laughs)

Kat: 05:55

Sorry

Scott: 05:56

Because she is absolutely amazing. And what happened when we actually arrived there to transfer her was completely unexpected. But, going back to face level trauma, it's just we all talk about it, the trauma of captivity, but we're only touching the tip of the iceberg of what's really going on internal.

Scott: 06:17

And that's when we started saying with the recovery that we saw at TES, and now with our understanding of how much they are growing and evolving and how much they can grow and evolve, still we're still trying to figure out where that ends, you know, that I don't know that there is one. But it's, we're, we're still just touching, we're still at the beginning stages of understanding this. And the trauma that really is so profound and impactful is the stuff that is much more deeply rooted.

Kat: 06:45

And this isn't, like, just a conversation for here. This is actually a conversation we've been having with each other for a week, a week and a half, just talking about - and it's not dismissing stereotyping and aggression and all of that trauma. I mean, that is substantial and it's significant, but it's trying to figure out who is actually looking past that. You know, it is the, people are so happy, the girls have space. They stop swaying. You know, they have a

natural habitat, which, of course, is integral for sanctuary. And it's amazing. And there are so few elephants around the world that have it. But, and I think it's part of being able to see the day to day and the tiny little changes, but there's so much more. And that so much more is generally the stuff that isn't being discussed, even with those who work with elephants, you know, who have worked with elephants and in different sanctuaries. And, you know, the conversation we ended up having was wondering how many people actually see it or recognize it, how many elephants actually go through it. Because every sanctuary is not the same. Every recovery is not the same. And what happens at different facilities is different.

Scott: 08:14

On the scientific level, when you talk about researchers and trying to analyze the development of elephants within sanctuary, the formulas that are created in the ethograms and these things that are designed are all about the physical activity of the elephants. And I talked to Shirlei this morning, one of the caregivers here. And a lot of times they measure recovery of elephants, of how much they were swaying or how much they weren't walking in their old facility compared to how much time they spend being, exhibiting more natural behaviors, you know. And, yes, this is profound recovery in its very physical manifestation, but it is still, and I said to her, how do you then record that look we saw in Bambi over the last two months? And she just smiled and she's like, you can't even verbalize it, much less try to.

Kat: 09:14

Quantify it in some way that science would acknowledge

Scott: 09:17

And there's so much that goes on that you can't talk about, that you can't really quantify, as Kat just said. But what everyone's focusing on is still the relatively superficial. You know it is, yeah, they're not swaying any more, you know, or very, very little. Yes, they're walking, you know, a hundred times more than they used to walk. Yes, they're socializing in ways that they have never socialized. And they're grazing, and they're doing all these things that they've never had the opportunity to do before. But these are still relatively superficial compared to the profound recovery of trauma, because trauma is not that, it's not skin deep. You know, it is, it is, it's not just the stimulation of a natural environment or the stimulation of a herd environment. It is the recovery of the heart and soul.

Nadia: 10:03

So Kat said in one of the episodes: nothing is linear with elephants. So, if on an amateur level, I would say, okay, the elephant isn't swaying any more, so that's good. And that is the face value trauma which is improving. And you're talking much, much deeper now. So if everything or, often it isn't linear with elephants, does that mean that you are seeing changes? So have you then seen elephants who maybe have been healing or that you're seeing the healing more psychologically then suddenly something triggers them that they go back to this initial face value trauma, so they start swaying again and showing the stereotypical behavior.

Kat: 10:44

I don't think it's... I don't want to say it's not drastic because, again, when you go into the deeper level of healing that we're talking about, you know, even steps that some people

might not notice are still, you know, significant. But, I don't think I've seen it that drastic where, you know, they've gone past that point and something happens and they go all the way back.

But, you know, it is that baby step thing. Sometimes it's two really big steps forward and then a baby step backwards. You know, sometimes it's just three little baby steps forward and then a big step backwards. But a lot of that, when you get to that nonlinear healing, I think most of that is that the deeper trauma that we're talking about, you know, it is those little nuances and behaviors that can often go unnoticed if you're not really paying attention which, oddly enough, happens more than you might think.

Nadia: 11:50

You talked about, about nuances now, maybe just take a step back, just to explain to listeners who do not actually know exactly what stereotypical behavior is. You have just touched on it a little bit and said, and they're like lost in their own world. And also, this behavior can be misunderstood. I know from elephants in Japan that there's one elephant, Teru, who has got this terrible stereotypical behavior. She sways, she, like, kicks her legs out and, and it's done repetitively. It's like, it's like, a like, it's choreographed. It's terrible. And the public thinks she's dancing.

Scott: 12:30

The public thinks she's dancing. And people that work in zoos and circuses will say that you need to do that to pump the blood through their system. You know, there's so much, it's so much of it is lies and manipulation of what the reality is. And zoos and circuses and people in the entertainment industry are covering up the reality, which it is a, it's a reaction to stress, it's a coping mechanism. It's a reaction to stress, it's a reaction to anxiety, it is something that they do to kind of, they get lost within that repetitive action. It is endorphin releasing. It does bring comfort. You know, and I think that's also understood and misunderstood.

Kat: 13:07

Yeah. It's been related to when somebody who is on the autism spectrum, sometimes they can have repetitive motions; they'll rock back and forth or wave their hands and it's the same. It's not the same. It is a very similar self-soothing. You know, like Scott said, it releases happy hormones in the brain. And the thing about it is, it becomes very habitual. It is very easy for an elephant that, once they kind of start that coping mechanism, it is hard to break that cycle. And we've seen it completely stop at sanctuary. Sometimes actually immediately, sometimes incrementally over months. But, you know, sometimes during high stress, it is something an elephant can go back to. I think we mentioned in one of the episodes in Tennessee when the elephants would have to stay in the barn at night during the winter, we would see them start stereotyping, even though they didn't do it, you know, during the nice weather outside at all. So, it is one of those things that they can fall back into relatively easily.

Scott: 14:19

You asked, to go back to what is stereotypical behavior, we'll go back there again. It can be any number of repetitive patterns. And we actually, to touch base on another elephant that is here, Guillermina, and we'll talk much more about Guillermina later on also. One of the consultants that was working, who had a lot of elephant experience, she was down in

Mendoza helping to do training of Pocha and Guillermina in preparation for the sanitary requirements that were required for importation. And she said, it's amazing that they don't stereotype and we said, wait a minute, she's stereotyping in this video that you're taking. And it wasn't the traditional stereotyping of bobbing and swaying the head or standing in one spot and doing like a little fiddling thing with her trunk. She would do circles. Sometimes in circles and sometimes figure eights. I think the figure eights were actually more, a little bit deeper and the circles were a little bit more superficial in terms of where she was in that stereotypical pattern.

Kat: 15:16

Yeah, the figure eight. She would lead with the head and do that whole...

Scott: 15:19

Yeah. And there's a different intensity to it at different times. And the leading with the head is something you actually see with males in musth, which is another topic for another episode. (everyone laughs) There's so much to discuss here, but with males there's just an intense energy to it. So the leading with the head, it's just, you know, putting their whole body into every step with more force, more power, more frustration.

Kat: 15:42

The stereotypes can be multistep. It sounds like the one elephant you're referring to in Japan does that where they do like, they'll sway back and forth and they'll kick out their leg, brush their leg backwards, touch something and then sway, and then - it tends to be the more complex the stereotype is; the longer they've been doing it and, or sometimes the more intense or and it can be both, the more intense it is. Same thing with speed. Usually the faster is much more intense, but there's definitely different degrees and different manifestations of how it can happen. But it is that repetitive motion that is used as a coping mechanism.

Scott: 16:27

And to go back to the elephant in Japan, only because we've heard this before also. People will say: this elephant's too far gone. Not true. Their elephant's too far gone to recover to sanctuary or to adapt to sanctuary. Completely not true. Or at least we have never encountered an elephant that was in that scenario. Even some that have been incredibly confined, isolated and malnourished, mistreated and...

Kat: 16:51

Unhealthy, unsocialized. I mean, like Guida stereotyping, she must have stereotyped about 98% of her day.

Scott: 17:01

Yeah, and just go back to Guida again. That stopped immediately. It wasn't a transition from that.

Nadia: 17:09

Amazing. I remember when episode three you said, you talked about, about Bunny, one of the elephants in Tennessee.

Kat: 17:14

Bunny! (Kat and Scott laugh)

Nadia: 17:16

I must say, when I, when I, when I relistened to that, it filled me with, with great hope. Because you said that she had been alone for 40 years of her 47 years, and that you had never until then had in an elephant who had been solitary for such a long time. And within 24 hours she was there. She was part of the herd. She was so elated were the words that you used and you said that she was so, so full of joy that she actually trumpeted so much that she burst the blood vessels in her nose and she had a nosebleed. And I just thought that, that is just so important for everybody who is saying, as you have said before, your critics, you know, elephants can't be moved. They'll never adapt. Because I thought about all the solitary elephants, not only that we are covering with elephants in Japan, but also Lucy and then Kaavan, who has been well, two years now in Cambodia Wildlife Sanctuary. He was, he was rescued and that there is hope. You know, it's never too late to give these elephants a chance. The life that they deserve.

Scott: 18:14

We have often said, and it goes back to the conversation - I think this came up in a conversation at the Buenos Aires Zoo when they were talking about some change for their elephants. And we said, you know, take a chance on success instead of living in fear of failure or living in fear of it not working. And all the reasons why elephants are not moved is because of fear of what might go wrong. But all those fears are not warranted, are not merit, and don't have merit based on what we have observed, not only here, not only in Tennessee...

Kat: 18:47

There's no support for that.

Scott: 18:47

Absolutely zero support. There's zero data that prevents, that that supports the fear or the doubts that are, that they're not going to adapt. They won't survive transport. All these things that we've said over and over and over again. But if you take a chance and give them a chance for recovery, they will absolutely amaze you.

Kat: 19:07

And I mean, we're not going to go into the stories now, (Scott laughs) but Sissy was said to be antisocial, autistic. She was a killer, so on and so forth. She was the sweetest, sweetest, sweetest herd mate who was so giving of herself when she was with other elephants. You had Bambi who was hiding in the corner of her barn from the other elephant that she was with. And they said, you know, she can't socialize with Maison. She's never going to socialize with anyone. So on and so forth. I mean, she fell in love with Mara, I think the second she met her for some reason. I'm not sure why. (Nadia laughs)

So yeah, I mean, it's story after story of an elephant who's been alone, like Rana. I mean, she was alone forever. She is so amazing with other elephants, and she gives them whatever it is they need. She is such a chameleon with adjusting, seeing how she is and who she is with each elephant. I mean, and this is an elephant who spent her entire lifetime

together (should have said alone). She's possibly 75 years old, and she comes here. She wasn't great with Maia and Guida when she first met them. She wanted friends so badly and they kind of shunned her a little bit.

Scott: 20:23

She was actually great with them. They weren't great with her because she was so pushy about things.

Nadia: 20:26

So needy.

Kat: 20:28

Yeah, that's the thing. She wasn't great in that she wasn't reading the room. You know, they're like: Listen kid, you're a little bit much. You need to slow down. And she's like: Comin' through. I'm going to stand right between the two of you. So, she just wasn't taking any of the hints. So they kind of shunned her a little bit. And that was the lesson. I think a big part of who she is now, realizing that, you know, sometimes it's not about what you want, that when it comes to living in a herd, you have to adjust to what is best for others. And I mean, she's phenomenal. And again, story after story of elephants that prove all of that wrong, yet none that prove it right. But facilities continue to say the same thing over and over again because they can.

Nadia: 21:19

So are these then the nuances you are talking about that in episode three you said that the, the level of complexity, the discussions you are having they changed, they change within TES, but they have definitely taken on a different level in Brazil. So face value trauma is obviously what you can see straightaway - physical damage and then the psychological, which is visible through stereotypical behavior. So the nuances, is that something like what you just mentioned, Kat? Or you just said, Scott, that Bambi's face is lighting up? She's got a presence. Are these the nuances that you are looking for?

Scott: 21:55

Yes. And so much more. (Kat and Nadia laugh)

Scott: 21:59

Truly there is. There is...

Nadia: 22:02

Damn. I feel like I had got it. (everyone laughs)

Scott: 22:05

We are, Nadia we have been doing this for a long time (Nadia laughs) and we are still amazed by the detail that they express, the way, the way they evolve, and the little subtle changes that actually are very meaningful and the importance of our responsibility to observe those and to grow with them. You can actually slow their growth down by not recognizing that they're moving forward.



They're changing, they're evolving just as every relationship, every individual does. And if you still see them for who they were even two weeks ago, then you're holding them back. You have to evolve and grow with them and see them for who they are now and continue to challenge yourself to evolve with them. And it's all, your ideas and your understanding has to continue to grow as well.

If we just stay where we were in our comfort zone, we're pretty comfortable with what we knew about elephants 20 years ago or ten years ago, if we stayed there. We're not going to evolve with the elephants and they are pushing us forward. But we have to force ourselves to work outside of our comfort zone and really put our ego to the side to say, I still have so much to learn.

Nadia: 23:28

Yes, that's what Kat said in episode three as well. You said that you continue learning about elephants until you're done working with them. And that brings me also, you said in episode three, you can hear - listeners you definitely have to listen to episode three again. You said that another way or another form of suppression is not listening and that elephants, when they realize we're not being listened to, they just shut off. But how do you, how do you listen? I mean, after ten years, I still don't understand my cat. (Kat laughs) You know, one day she does this and the next day she does that. And I thought, okay, okay, cats are different. Okay? But I mean, an elephant is so large. So is it facial expressions? Is it like, oh, say for my cat I know if she twitches it could be that she wants to play, but it could be that she's about to scratch me because she doesn't want me to stroke her anymore. So what do you look for in such a large animal? What are the nuances? Is it the eyes?

Kat: 24:23

I mean, it's everything. Unfortunately. (Scott laughs) I know you want a simple answer...

Scott: 24:27

It's all that and more.

Kat: 24:28

...but it's not going to happen. Anybody can - and you'll understand why I say this in a second - anyone can take care of an elephant. Anyone can throw hay to an elephant. Anyone can put food down. Anyone can do the basics with an elephant. That's not the hard part. When we talk to caregivers and we hire caregivers, we talk about the learning curve. We talk about how much of it is observation and getting to know not just elephants, but each individual who they are, how they move, who their friends are, how they socialize. It's everything from their noises, to their expressions, their facial expressions. You know, what it means when one elephant turns their back to another.

You know, it's like that thing of people ask: What does it mean when an elephant flaps their ears? It's like, Well, I can only relate it to when a person smiles. What does it mean when a person smiles? Are they happy all the time? No, they could be covering something up because they're not happy. It could be a smirk, it could be sarcasm. I mean, there's a million different meanings to each little action and part of understanding what it is they're expressing is knowing what that means for each individual.

And the hardest part for caregivers is often quieting your own nonsense. (proudly) I just edited myself from cursing. (Nadia laughs) It's, we all come with baggage. We all have life stories that shape the way we see things. You know, some people are more protective, some people are more relaxed. Some people have had certain relationships that color the way they see other relationships. Whatever it is, we all have stuff that we bring into the way we see the world. And it's the same with elephants. And one of the hardest things is to kind of shut off your own filters and your own ideas of just going to an easy: Oh, she did this, so it must be this, and shutting all of that off and actually sitting there and watching them. Trying to understand them - a big part of it is having to shut yourself off. And so much of it is just quiet observation and really letting them not literally speak to you and being open to what they're conveying.

Scott: 26:54

I don't think it's much different than a human, human relationship.

Nadia: 26:58

Okay.

Scott: 27:00

You can be, you can see somebody superficially or you can quiet yourself and really feel them - not touch them to feed them (Nadia and Kat laugh) but feel their energy or feel their vibe. (everyone laughs)

Nadia: 27:16

I think we understand what you mean. So when you say quiet and in your mind, you mean you don't sort of, you actually read it? That's, that's a very interesting thing because it's a lot about presence and very, very spiritual. So you must, like, interpret what you think you're seeing the, but with the baggage as Kat said that you brought with you. So you're not actually interpreting you're just actually watching it and then letting it show itself to you without you interpreting what it is.

Scott: 27:42

And not wanting all the answers all the time, which is a huge problem for humans. People want to define everything and people want to know what it is and want to label it. And many times we don't know until maybe three weeks from now what the behavior was actually about. And keep your mind open for those possibilities. (Scott laughs)

Kat: 28:00

It's like that human thing of, you know, how some people don't actually really listen. Like as soon as you get like a sentence or two in and you say something that they're already formulating their response in their head of what they're going to say back to you. It's similar. It's, you know, just quieting yourself, which is really hard for most people to do.

Scott: 28:28

And to get back to what are those nuances. It is everything from just how it feels in that moment. You know, you can walk into a room and feel if there's a good emotion or a heavy emotion. It can be a party but maybe somebody just told a bad joke and you kind of have that vibe that something went not quite right. Even though it's a happy environment,

something is still a little bit off. And you can feel that, you can, you can perceive that and it's kind of the same thing with elephants. So you have to - what is that vibe? But also be careful. As we said, don't label it right away, be open to it. Watch the facial expressions, watch the nuances and motions.

You know Guille changes on a daily basis. You know, she may look like she's doing the same thing, but there's a total different vibe to what it is that she's bringing into the picture. The elephants perceive it long before she gets there, and she, they respond differently when she's 30 yards away, 30 meters away or more, they start to respond differently, whether she's in a really easy place or she's in a little bit of a hard place. They're already changing their behavior long before she arrives to the direct scene. And there's, there's a lot happening with them with that vibration, with the energy, with the, the feeling of what's out there. But there is also just the nuances of expression, the facial expressions.

Kat: 29:43

Faces tell a lot.

Scott: 29:43

Faces tell a lot, eyes tell a lot, just as they do with your dog or with your cat or with your partner, with your children. These are all forms of communication that we do every single day. They're just applying it to a different species. But they are still a species that is even more intricately communicative than we are.

So we have to try to adapt to those nuances. And when you start seeing those nuances, that's when they really start to communicate more and start to show you more of who they are and feel comfortable.

Kat: 30:17

Yeah, because they absolutely notice when you are seeing what they're trying to communicate and the more you see, the more they communicate back. And that's when, you know, you really start to make progress with some of these elephants and why it's so important and something we encourage in them as soon as they get here. Communication is a big thing because it is integral for their recovery.

Nadia: 30:46

Yes. As you said, you ended episode three and you said that when they actually realize that you're listening and you're trying to understand it's like a, like a light bulb going off. Yes. That's such a fascinating and such a complex topic that we can talk about for episodes and we will be touching on this subject again.

But before we get cut off, we've got 4 minutes left. I'll say goodbye and say thank you. Thanks for your time. And yes, for all this interesting information. It's just so amazing.

Scott: 31:21

Thank you again, Nadia, and for helping us create this opportunity to share some of this, because it is this fascinating even for us who are living each day. It's still really intriguing. And I think it's a huge part of what keeps us so involved with creating this space for recovery

because we know how powerful it is and how much we still have to understand of what they're capable of.

Nadia: 31:47

Okay, well, have a great week and thanks for your time and we will catch up next week then for another recording or whenever your time permits. Okay.

Kat: 31:59

Ok thank you. (laughs)

Scott: 32:01

Thanks, Nadia.

Kat: 32:02

Bye, Nadia

Scott: 32:03

Bye, Nadia, we'll talk soon.

Nadia: 32:05

Bye. Okay, listeners, thank you so much for joining in today. We hope you enjoyed the episode. If you did, do subscribe and to make sure that you never miss another episode. And also, please do leave a friendly review or rating to make sure that this podcast is shown to more people and that the wonderful work of Global Sanctuary for Elephants is spread into the furthest corner or the farthest corner of the of the planet to make sure that we are doing all that we can to help and support captive elephants.

So until we meet up in two weeks time, take care.