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GLOBAL RUMBLINGS

News from Global Sanctuary for Elephants

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Rana (behind) & Mara (front)

Honoring the Journey:

Trauma-Informed Care in Elephants

Captivity is the most damaging thing that can be done to the spirit of a wild animal. And while even a natural sanctuary life can't replace the piece of their essence lost so long ago, we can provide them with something incredibly meaningful–something most captive animals don't have, and sadly, many people as well. Sanctuary becomes a healthy home, one of safety and respect, where elephants not only have space and autonomy, but the support of humans and others of their own kind; this environment allows them to heal from significant and smaller-but-repeated traumas they have suffered, that have further caused their light to fade.

When elephants first arrive at sanctuary, the strong presence often associated with elephants is usually nowhere to be found. They are emotionally drained and tired after decades of being unseen, sometimes abused, alone, or uncared for. Our sanctuary exists to create a place where that can shift. We've never tried to label the type of care we provide or the space we try to create, but the basis of what we do already exists in a human medical methodology and has now transferred to animal care: trauma-informed care. It is not just about choice and space, but about safety, stress management, transparency, peer support, collaboration, and empowerment –all the core principles of trauma-informed care. It is an approach that not only looks at the individual as a whole, including their past traumas and their consequences, but also considers the direct care provided and the caregiver's emotional state. It is the caregivers who initially provide the support that helps elephants reignite their soul spark as they begin to navigate life in a herd.

Rana is a wonderful animal example of what the caregivers strive to be. She is a chameleon elephant, one who transforms into whatever it is another elephant needs at the time. This is also the role of a caregiver, but there are many parts to this. As caregivers, there is not only a desire to see each individual for what they need, but also to see them for who they are, setting our own wants and agendas aside.

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BRAZILIAN BEATS

Catch up with life at Elephant Sanctuary Brazil

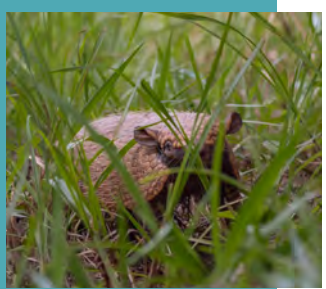
KEEPING UP WITH SASSY

Earlier this year, Sassy, the tapir who was released years ago from our wildlife rehabilitation program, made an unexpected reappearance. We've seen her several times over the years, sometimes with an adorable baby following behind her, but this time was different. After days of staff seeing a limping tapir, she was found laying still in the pond, seemingly in need of help. The care team was able to sedate her and safely move her into one of the wildlife enclosures. Since tapirs can weigh over 600 pounds, the team had to be creative in caring for Sassy. They used a tarp and backhoe to lift her, and the maintenance team built a special treatment chute that linked two enclosures (like the ones used for the elephants) so the vets could safely work with her. There was a wound with an exposed discolored bone, but the surgical team was able to remove the affected bone, treat the infection, and support her in healing. After more than two months of daily care, she made a successful recovery and was released.

Kat & Sassy

We also recently had a much smaller guest come for a brief stay. While the sanctuary's maintenance team was working on perimeter fencing, they came across an unusually sluggish armadillo (known as a *tatu* in Portuguese). The caregivers moved him into a wildlife enclosure to monitor him, but the newcomer was full of life and energy after only a few days in care. The staff named him Diego, and successfully released him back onto sanctuary grounds.

Supporting the area's wildlife makes us better stewards of the community, and they all have our respect, whether they are a large, returning visitor coming for a long stay or a tiny newcomer just passing through.



Diego

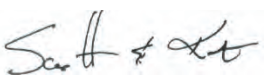
Dear Sanctuary Family,

Rejuvenation, recovery, discovery, and transformation are all words that have described what sanctuary offers to residents fortunate enough to call this their home. These words also describe sanctuary as its own living entity, a dynamic organism that encompasses all of those who reside within, read about, support, and manifest this healing space. Through the past months, the sanctuary has been challenged. With the unexpected passing of Kenya and Pupy, almost every aspect of sanctuary was rattled. Internal doubts, external attacks, and personal emotional breakdowns tested us to the core. And, once again, as it has shown many times over the past 30 years, sanctuary as the living entity has strength, wisdom, and resilience that is beyond measure, and it knows the journey forward.

During a few recent visits from journalists, researchers, authorities, and even a small group of veterinarians from the federal veterinary council, the true spirit of sanctuary, and the resilience injected into each of those living within, transformed the minds of its guests. In every case, without fail, the visitors parted with words such as: unexpected, demystified, infinitely impressed, here to help; they said they could never have imagined what this place is, or is capable of, before seeing it directly. The work done by the care team is remarkable and their capacity for learning, for seeking to understand the elephants, and to provide what they need and beyond, is extraordinary. And, not to belabor this, but when our guests' parting words were shared, our team felt the entity of sanctuary grow as it shines a smile that originates from a core of profound strength.

Each week, we spend time talking to the teams here on site at Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, discussing pretty much everything involved with living, working, celebrating and recovering from the realities of sanctuary. In one of our discussions with the care team, following the passing of Kenya, one of her primary caregivers read through tear-filled eyes that sanctuary is a facility where animals are brought to live and to be protected, to receive care and to be respected for the rest of their lives, emphasizing the last four words. Sanctuary is for life. There will be more heartache to come; this is the pure reality of what we do as a true sanctuary. And through this work, we are gifted unimaginable experiences of joyous elephant parties, global unity, and transformative growth for all, as we follow the path and interconnected journey of sanctuary.

Forever grateful,



Scott and Kat Blais, GSE Co-Founders

Friendship and Healing:
Pupy and Kenya's Final Chapters

Kenya

This year, all of our lives changed when African elephants Kenya and Pupy made ESB their home. They were both spirited and brought unique energies to the sanctuary, exploring and making the most of their new lives. But after decades of captivity, their bodies were extremely damaged and they left us too soon.

Pupy, you approached your time at the sanctuary as you lived much of your life: softly, quietly, but with a deep well of strength, those extra large eyes open and observing. We loved seeing you explore your enclosures, slowly at first, then with great speed, with snapping and chewing of branches, charcoal from the burnt trees all over your face, some nights hiding so deeply in the woods that we could only find you by listening for the flapping of your ears or a quiet breath.

And Kenya, you barreled into sanctuary life with great spirit, your heart larger than your body. Despite your decades alone, or maybe because of them, your energy and zest for life were beautiful to behold. You face-planted in dirt piles, kicking your back feet up in the air. Early on you carried your tire around, but you soon became more enamored with the natural elements of your habitat; you broke and moved trees, ran into the woods, and bellowed into the wind during big storms. And the variety of your vocalizations was unmatched.

Watching the two of you learn how to have a relationship together was one of the greatest gifts. Kenya, you were so excited to finally be within touching distance of a friend; you at first ran to her with your typical energy, desperate to touch and connect. Pupy needed a little more space, and you learned to give it to her, approaching more gently and respectfully, keeping yourself calm only to walk away and explode with happiness at a safe distance afterward.

Pupy, it was beautiful to watch you find your voice. In the beginning, you walked away from Kenya when she got near, sometimes disappearing to the back of the yard for the day. As you found more confidence, you became a more effective communicator, rumbling at Kenya to let her know when space was needed. When you saw that Kenya responded with respect, you used your voice even louder, and the two of you found your balance.

Kenya, you finally were able to be the protective big sister you were born to be, standing watch over Pupy as she lay down. And Pupy, for the first time in your life, you set boundaries with another elephant and with your caregivers and had your voice heard and respected. You kept a balance of gentleness with a feisty spirit right up to the end.

We still expect to see Pupy in the mud wallow or hear Kenya's dragon noises in greeting. It is a comfort to know that their spirits are free and united, the way they were always meant to be. Someone recently said that a sanctuary should be a place for you to find whatever it is you need. If what you needed was to feel freedom, to meet and love one another, and then to shed the burdens of your prior life in a place where you felt seen and cared for, we are honored that you could find a home at the sanctuary. We thank both elephants for showing us what it means to keep an open heart in the face of difficult circumstances, how to balance quiet strength with jubilant playfulness, and that great change is always possible, even in a short time.

-Michele

Kenya (behind) & Pupy (front)

Rain, Mud, & Pond Fun:
Life With the Asian Elephants

For the past few months, it's been rainy season here at ESB, which means that the temperatures are milder and there's lots and lots of mud. All five of the elephants have been taking advantage of the wet weather to get extra dirty and play in the ponds. We can't be sure why, but most of the girls like swimming or submerging when the rain starts–sometimes they'll turn and head directly there when the first raindrops fall. It's charming to see them express their excitement in such a joyful way.

The elephants have separated themselves into two groups: Mara and Rana, and Maia, Bambi, and Guillermina. A while back, some tension developed between Bambi and Mara, and Bambi still shows hesitation when Mara is near. To make sure everyone's emotional health is taken into account, the groups stay in separate yards, though they have met across a fence line a couple of times. Bambi keeps her friends close during these moments, but Maia and Mara have had some interactions, though limited.

Rana (behind) & Mara (front)

Guille, Bambi & Maia

Bambi's cataracts continue to be a challenge for her; she arrived at sanctuary blind in her left eye, and her right eye is now losing vision as well. She gets twice-daily eye drops to make sure she's comfortable and to hopefully slow the progression, and she's been facing the vision changes with the help of her constant companion, Maia. Maia has become Bambi's champion, giving her support when she needs it and seeming to lift her spirits when Bambi expresses unease or doubt. The two have been traveling to the back of Yard 5 and across the creek, somewhere that Lady used to love for its deep wooded areas, fresh green grasses, and sloping (but not too-tall) hills.

Guille brings a lighthearted energy to the group and can inject liveliness and humor into the day, but she's also proven that she can be Bambi's trusted companion, spending time by her side and even roughhousing when Bambi is in the mood. Bambi has been the one initiating silliness lately, especially when the three are in the pond. Meanwhile, Maia has a special role in Guille's life as the elephant who has the energy and pure muscle to play in the way that a young elephant really needs to. Maia can be a stern teacher, but she seems to have a tender spot in her heart for Guille.

Rana and Mara, often referred to as our resident "grandmas," have a calm energy, but that doesn't mean they can't get spunky when they're in the mood. Recently, we've found them playing in the dirt piles near the barn on a couple of different rainy days, spraying themselves with mud and even smushing their faces and bums into the increasingly soft and mushy dirt. If they are close, they will come into the barn together for morning treatments, and they have been known to vocalize to each other. If Rana gets extra silly while she's in the chute, we open it up so she can engage with Mara. During those moments, they will hang out and sometimes trumpet and rumble in the excitement of just being together.

Just like the group of three, this duo has been staying in the pond recently. Mara seems to be the goofier of the two in these moments, scooting around on the muddy shore with her behind. Rana seems to like submerging more than splashing and can be found floating on her side with her trunk emerging from the water like a snorkel. Elephants have a different way of using their chest muscles and lungs than other mammals, which is why they can stay underwater for long periods of time without having to come to the surface.

Overall, life for the Asian elephants has been uneventful, and that's a great thing. There's plenty of time to graze and spray themselves with mud; there's so much green in the habitat because of the precipitation, so no matter where they go, they can find grass that's just the right height, ponds that are full to the brim, and friends to explore with, if they choose.

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Guillermina

Only with this individualized and honest approach will the elephants feel confident in themselves and blossom back into who they once were, decades ago. This requires a therapy-like setting for caregivers: many large-life discussions, a lot of soul-searching, and the need to be honest about what they bring into the scenario and how that can affect others and the elephants. There is a significant depth of self-reflection needed to recognize what is truly going on with another being. But when caregivers come to elephants emotionally open and aware, the elephants recognize the honesty, and this allows some of their old defenses against humans to drop, and the healing progresses further.

It can be difficult for some caregivers to embrace the not-so-positive in each individual and not feel as though they are seeing the elephants as "bad". But trauma-informed care only comes through the recognition of everything the elephant has gone through and acknowledging the effect those things have on their behavior. Without that acknowledgement, there is no way to work through it. The signs of trauma are clear: Maia, who arrived with her hyper-vigilance, Guida with her relentless stereotyping, Guille with her pacing, Bambi and Mara with their bobbing and swaying. Numerous elephants learned to throw objects to be heard, to protect themselves, or simply to clear humans out of their space. We've known many elephants who display aggression at varying levels, including Lady, who learned that the only way people paid attention to her was to slam her head in their direction. The signs of trauma are present in every elephant who has arrived at sanctuary; moving through that trauma is the hard part.

And although it is imperative for the elephants' caregivers to play a loving role in their day-to-day lives, a major component of trauma-informed care is peer support, which must be provided by other elephants. They are the only ones who can truly understand the emotional damage they have all suffered, which often started in infancy when they were taken away from their mothers, and was followed by decades of struggles and social disruptions. Having the opportunity to choose their companions–or whether to share space with others at all–is new, especially for elephants who have been alone or have shared space with someone they were incompatible with.

Despite having every reason to be maladjusted, captive elephants are resilient to a fault. The amazing individuals in our care have all shown that, with all they have been through, caregiving is ingrained in the deepest part of their being. It is who they are, and they use their own style of trauma-informed care towards each other. Rana, who would share yards with Lady, always respected Lady's 20-foot bubble that she did not want anyone to cross. This allowed Lady to be nurtured by another elephant in a way she was comfortable with. Maia, who, even though she never seemed to heal fully after Guida's death, sensed how deep Bambi's struggles were and decided to put Bambi first and open her heart once again, knowing the level of hurt that can come at the end. Kenya, who was so excited to have a friend, realized that Pupy's negative past relationships required Kenya to proceed slowly, so she restrained herself and allowed Pupy to set the pace, resulting in her comfort and a very sweet relationship when they came together. And during one of the saddest but most significant herd moments–when Pocha passed away–Guille called the rest of the girls to her, and, even though some of them weren't fully comfortable with Guille, they all came to her, walking alongside her to her mother, one by one, and then stayed with her throughout the night.

The elephants are the ones who take healing to a level that allows each one's glow to return, but it only happens when all of the other pieces are in place–the safety, security, autonomy, love, and support that create their special home. And we are beyond grateful to be able to provide that for them and help them to find their way back to the essence of an elephant.

Bambi

Growing Bigger, Growing Stronger

Construction projects at ESB come in all sizes but, no matter how big or small, each finished project changes what daily life can look like for the elephants and the people who care for them.

We often talk about the power of space when it comes to healing. The fourth yard of the Female African Habitat expansion is now complete, adding more room for future elephants in need of sanctuary. We've since begun Phase III of the Female Asian Habitat expansion, bringing us closer to nearly 200 additional acres for the elephants to explore and live with even greater freedom.

We also reached an important milestone in the Male Asian Habitat, where Yard 3 is now finished.

Beyond the habitat expansions, other essential projects are moving forward. Maintenance continues on the perimeter fence, which strengthens security around the property. We have also made significant progress on the wildlife enclosures, with a sizable aviary, a large soft-release area, and several small and mid-sized enclosures now complete, supporting our rehabilitation and release program for other animals who share this landscape.

One project we are eager to complete is the caregiver house at the East Gate. The roof is in place, but the interior still requires significant work before it is ready to be lived in. It still requires electric and plumbing, plus shelving and windows.

Welding crew at work

Even so, we are making steady headway. Each completed project moves sanctuary forward, from expanding elephant spaces to supporting the people and programs that sustain life here.

Meet Dr. Mateus: ESB's Lead Veterinarian

Sanctuary veterinarian Mateus has always loved animals. As a kid growing up in Brazil, he would look through his family's encyclopedias, trying to find pictures of animals. This curiosity led him to pursue veterinary medicine at Federal University of Mato Grosso (UFMT), where he focused on wildlife medicine.

During his studies, he gained hands-on experience in the care and rehabilitation of native Brazilian wildlife, working closely with animals such as giant anteaters, parrots, and tapirs.

Mateus treating Bambi

Throughout his studies, Mateus did not imagine that he would one day work with elephants. After a friend told him about ESB, he began to research the sanctuary and was deeply moved by the sanctuary's impact in providing a better life for captive elephants. The more he learned, the more he knew that he wanted to be involved. Soon after, he joined the sanctuary team as a caregiver and vet.

Over the past six years, he has grown into the role of ESB's lead veterinarian. As Mateus knows well, elephant veterinary care is rarely straightforward. You can't run many of the diagnostic tests (MRI, CT scan, main-body ultrasound) that you can on other animals due to their size, and many medications don't have established elephant dosage guidelines. Because of these challenges, providing effective medical care depends just as much on understanding the individual elephant as on having expert medical knowledge.

For this reason, veterinary care at ESB begins long before any treatment is needed. It starts with quiet observation, daily interactions, and building trust.

For Mateus, this daily practice is at the heart of his work because it allows him to understand the intricacies of each elephant as an individual. "When I started working with elephants individually, I noticed how different they are from one another. If you take your time to listen to them, to connect with them, you will see that they are very different from one another." This perspective shapes every decision he makes, ensuring that each elephant receives care that respects her unique needs.

Reflecting on his path, Mateus could never have imagined where his childhood passion would take him. From reading about elephants in encyclopedias to learning directly from them, he is grateful for the daily lessons they teach and the privilege of being a part of their lives each day.

Elephants in the Classroom

Carl E. Schluter Elementary's Youth Changemaker Club

Raising awareness about elephant captivity and the role of sanctuary is a core part of our mission. Every day, we look for ways to deepen our impact and create more meaningful conversations about what elephants need to heal from the traumas of their past.

Over the past several months, our US team has been piloting *Hope for the Herd*, a youth education program designed to bring these conversations into elementary school classrooms. Our efforts to develop an engaging, age-appropriate curriculum have been guided by fourth-grade teacher Rachel Friend, who is the lead sponsor for her school's Youth Changemaker Club and the winner of the Association of Professional Humane Educators 2026 Humane Educator of the Year Award.

From the start of our collaboration with Mrs. Friend, it was clear we shared the same goal: helping students connect their love for animals with empathy, critical thinking, and real-world impact.

Rather than impressing students with our own perspectives, our goal has been to share the stories of the sanctuary elephants and invite them to explore, ask questions, and draw their own conclusions. Instead of focusing only on general facts, students learn about the elephants who have lived at our sanctuary, including their personalities, histories, and social lives. Through these stories, they begin to recognize that, just like them, elephants are individuals with unique experiences, relationships, and needs.

continued on page 8...

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

June 12-20, 2026

Scan Me for more information

SPONSOR OR DONATE

For sponsorship information, or to donate an auction item, please contact christine@GlobalElephants.org

TRUNKS & TREASURES

THIRD ANNUAL ONLINE AUCTION FOR ELEPHANTS

Join Global Sanctuary for Elephants for our 3rd annual Online Auction. Bid on a variety of incredible treasures donated from all over the world.

100% of proceeds raised will support the herd's medical care including treatments, diagnostic testing, equipment, supplies, and more.

THE SANCTUARY CIRCLE: LEAVING A LEGACY FOR ELEPHANTS

The Sanctuary Circle honors those who have included GSE in their will or other planned gifts. These thoughtful supporters help ensure elephants in need will always have a place to heal and belong.

Members are recognized on our Virtual Donor Wall, in our biannual newsletter, and in our annual report. The Sanctuary Circle is our way of thanking you for your vision and dedication.

We are deeply grateful to those who become members of the Sanctuary Circle by including GSE in their plans. Their generosity and foresight help sustain our vital work for years to come.

Living Legacy

Abby Balaban
Stephanie C. Bell
Rebecca Bostwick
Carol Chapman
Suzanne Eaton
Rick & Doe Fowler
Gudrun & Mark Howard
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Brenda L. Clayton
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Joan Lichterman
Kayle Luthey
Toni Rapone
Jean Tryon
Fiona Wilde
Alice Zollicoffer
5 Anonymous Donors

To learn more about joining the Sanctuary Circle or including GSE in your will, contact Christine at 615-435-9523 or christine@GlobalElephants.org. Together, we can create a world where captive elephants are treated with the love and respect they deserve.

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Throughout the lessons, students asked thoughtful questions and explored complex ideas about captivity and sanctuary. Many chose to express what they learned through poetry that they later shared at a student-led fundraising event, a special highlight for the students, Mrs. Friend, and our entire GSE team. These experiences have also sparked new perspectives within students' families, showing how quickly awareness can grow when young people feel connected and passionate about an issue.

The multi-week curriculum is suitable for students in grades 3–6 and includes detailed lesson plans, student resources, activity suggestions, and a digital escape room designed to make learning interactive and memorable.

By helping students see elephants as individuals and understand the purpose of sanctuary, we hope to inspire a generation that thinks more empathetically about the lives of animals and feels empowered to create change. If you or a teacher you know would like access to this free and engaging grade-school curriculum, we would love to hear from you.

Bambi (behind) & Maia (front)

LET'S BE SOCIAL

Follow us on social for in-depth updates about our work and stories about the elephants at Elephant Sanctuary Brazil, as well as the latest global elephant news.

@GlobalElephants | @Sanctuary4Elephants

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Visit our store at: shop.globalelephants.org

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT WHILE GIVING BACK

Shop with a purpose! When you wear a tee or carry a tote, you help raise awareness about the work of GSE and the importance of sanctuary. Plus, a portion of the proceeds from each sale supports the organization.

GLOBAL SANCTUARY for ELEPHANTS

Protecting, Rescuing, and Providing Sanctuary for Elephants Worldwide

Global Sanctuary for Elephants exists to create vast safe spaces for captive elephants, where they are able to heal physically and emotionally. There are elephants around the world in need of sanctuary, but too few places exist to be able to care for even a fraction of them. Global support is necessary to build sanctuaries for elephants in need of rescue and rehabilitation.

SCAN TO HELP THE ELEPHANTS

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Rana

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