

Taken from The Buttonwood Park Zoo Elephant Management Policy & Elephant Keeper Handbook Revised January 2013 (Seventh Edition)**Keeper Training Program**

The training of new keepers is essential to proper care of the Zoo's elephants. Emphasis is on safety and consistency when working with or around the elephants. All new elephant keepers go through a (minimum) six-month apprenticeship.

During the initial phase of a new keeper's training period, he/she will work with the Elephant Manager and at least one other qualified elephant handler. The Elephant Manager is responsible for the implementation of the program. He/she is also responsible for coordinating and the training of new staff, instructing each new staff member in every aspect of elephant handling, management, and safety routines as outlined in the Elephant Management Policy.

During the initial phase of training (Level I), the new keeper's duties will include clean up and other related elephant care duties, and familiarization with established zoo and elephant protocols. Once the trainee shows proficiency in all assigned tasks and passes an initial evaluation by the Elephant Manager, he/she will be reviewed by the EMC. Upon EMC approval, he/she will begin to work alongside either the Elephant manager or two qualified elephant handlers, with or without the presence of the Elephant Manager.

At this point in training, the keeper should be familiar with the following:

- ✓ elephant management policy
- ✓ elephant and zoo safety and emergency protocols
- ✓ radio use protocols and emergency codes
- ✓ fire extinguisher locations
- ✓ material data sheet (MSDS) location
- ✓ location of all light switches, circuit breakers, drains, fans, vents, and controls for heating and ventilation system
- ✓ pool maintenance and pool drain operation
- ✓ daily routines including cleaning, feeding, watering, enrichment, training and medical treatments
- ✓ preparation and storage locations of foodstuffs
- ✓ record keeping system including behavior profiles of each elephant, daily keeper log and incident reports for each elephant
- ✓ proper use of the guide
- ✓ basic behavioral cues "Move Up", "Back Up", "Get Over", "Steady"

The trainee should have the ability to assist with animal shifting and elephant procedures in the presence of two qualified elephant handlers. The new keeper must carry a guide while performing daily routines, observe training sessions with the elephants and assist

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safely with elephant baths. The keeper should have a basic understanding of elephant “psychology” and operant conditioning.

During the next two months of training (Level II), the duties of the new keeper will include free contact with the elephants for routine husbandry such as feeding, watering and bathing and observation of footwork. Trainees are expected to practice the verbal behavioral cues and utilize the guide on cue points used by the handlers during these routines.

The new keeper will begin issuing verbal cues, learning to work with each of the animals in turn. Progress will be monitored by the Elephant Manager who will issue a recommendation to the EMC that the keeper be moved to the final level of training when he/she accomplishes the following: (in the presence of two qualified elephant keepers)

- ✓ demonstrates the ability to perform routine maintenance of exhibit yards and barn while sharing the same space with elephants in a free contact situation.
- ✓ demonstrates an ability and inclination to develop a positive personal relationship with each elephant
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to work as a team and communicate with fellow elephant handlers, readily accepting and offering critique in a positive manner
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to give verbal cues properly and consistently gain cooperation from the elephants
- ✓ demonstrates the correct method for gaining cooperation, including cue points, physical cues and tone of voice

During the final phase of training, the duties of the new keeper will include the management of each elephant in free contact utilizing all of the verbal cues and cue points established by the BPZ Elephant Management Policy. The new keeper must demonstrate proficiency in all aspects of elephant care, including foot care, skin care, etc. A final satisfactory progress evaluation and recommendation from the Elephant Manager to the Elephant Management Committee is required before the new keeper is considered a qualified elephant keeper. The EMC will meet to consider and approve or delay approval of a keeper as a qualified elephant keeper.

In order to be considered a qualified elephant keeper, the trainee must:

- ✓ demonstrate the ability to give any and all verbal and physical cues properly
- ✓ consistently gain cooperation from the elephants
- ✓ demonstrates an ability and inclination to develop a positive personal relationship with each elephant
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to work as a team and communicate with fellow elephant handlers, readily accepting and offering critique in a positive manner

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- ✓ utilize the established method for correcting non-compliance while handling the elephants in daily husbandry and training routines (See “Training Techniques”)
- ✓ demonstrate the ability to consistently and correctly perform and implement all husbandry routines with no direction from the Elephant Manager
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to act as a back up handler when working with another qualified handler
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to present appropriate and accurate information to the public in a professional and courteous manner.
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to correctly perform foot care on the elephants including daily foot inspections and corrective foot trims.
- ✓ demonstrates the ability to identify behavioral and/or medical abnormalities in the elephants as well as implement corrective measures in consultation with appropriate staff (i.e. Elephant Manager, Veterinary staff and other elephant keepers)
- ✓ demonstrate the ability to problem solve

Elephant relief or backup keepers are those keepers who do not work in the elephant area daily. These keepers are qualified handlers, having gone through the same training as all qualified elephant keepers. These keepers can be used as handlers in the case of sick, vacation, compensatory, or personal time use by permanent elephant staff. Elephant relief keepers must consistently demonstrate proficient elephant husbandry skills.