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SF Zoo Retracts Accusations Against Elephant Advocates

Zoo Uses “Emotions” as Excuse for Lying

San Francisco, CA . . . In Defense of Animals and local animal advocates are demanding a formal apology and retraction from the San Francisco Zoo for allegations that local activists agitated two Asian elephants on Sunday leading to the euthanasia of one of them. The demand comes in the wake of the zoo’s retraction of those allegations.

In a television interview with NBC 11 yesterday, San Francisco Zoo director Manuel Mollinedo stated, “I don’t want to lay blame on anybody” for the death of Calle, the ailing Asian elephant who was euthanized at 3 a.m. Sunday morning after being pushed down by her longtime companion Tinkerbelle.

Mollinedo explained, “My position is it has been a very tense period right now because of Calle’s declining health. I really do not want to lay blame on anybody. I think they did have somebody here filming. My staff was extremely concerned about the situation with Calle. Emotions got higher than they should have because of the sad situation that we were confronted with. I don’t want to lay blame on anybody.”

Last week, the Zoo had announced plans to euthanize Calle because she suffered from critical health problems that are known to be caused and exacerbated by the conditions of captivity. But on Sunday, after they euthanized the elephant, the Zoo issued a statement blaming animal rights activists for the incident that accelerated Calle’s demise. The Zoo’s allegations were widely reported in the media:

“Zoo euthanizes Calle after final controversy: Activists blamed for causing another elephant to push her down. [headline] . . . In a statement released Sunday afternoon, zoo officials blamed animal rights protesters for agitating the elephants before the attack.” San Francisco Chronicle (March 8, 2004)

“San Francisco zoo keepers blame animal rights activists for an attack on an ailing female elephant by another elephant and her eventual death by euthanasia.” UPI, March 8, 2004.

“Activists also protested on Saturday as zoo officials decided whether to put Calle down. Zoo officials say the two elephants became agitated by the protesters, causing Tinkerbelle to knock Calle down.” KCBS, March 8, 2004.

“The Zoo attempted to deflect attention from the real story of Calle’s death by fabricating a side controversy,” said Suzanne Roy of In Defense of Animals. “The real story is that captivity killed Calle and the Zoo must transfer its surviving elephants to sanctuaries before the tragedy is repeated.”

In Defense of Animals and Citizens for Cruelty-Free Entertainment are also demanding that the Zoo make a formal commitment to immediately send all three surviving elephants (Tinkerbelle Maybelle and Lulu) to a sanctuary that can provide an environment in which the elephants can heal and thrive.

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