



Via electronic communication

URGENT

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CHARLIE THE ELEPHANT SHOWCASING STEREOTYPICAL BEHAVIOUR AT THE PARTY VENUE PRETORIA ZOO IN SOUTH AFRICA

Filmed and published on the social media platform *TikTok*, the Elephant known as Charlie [showcases stereotypical behaviour](#) at the Pretoria Zoo. The video is posted by *TikTok* subscriber Anell Eelox with the caption “*This elephant is feeling the music, the cutest thing I saw today #elephantdancing #majestic #pretoriazoo*”

Stereotypes are repetitive, seemingly functionless actions. In Elephants, they typically involve repeated rocking from side to side, swaying, and head bobbing and appear in those animals who are strictly confined such as, for example, [chained](#). The presence of stereotypic behaviour is **widely**¹ acknowledged to be an indicator of [poor animal husbandry](#), and [suffering](#). Stereotypic behaviour also indicates [social isolation](#), or [conflict, anxiety, frustration](#) or [fear and severe anxiety](#).

Dr Bob Jacobs, a member of PREN, neuroscientist at Colorado College and an expert in comparative neuroscience in particular the brains of Elephants, has highlighted how Elephants and cetaceans share several characteristics that make them especially vulnerable to impoverished artificial environments, which affect and damage the fine structure and function

¹ Greco BJ, Meehan CL, Hogan JN, Leighty KL, Mellen J, Mason G, Mench JA. *The days and nights of zoo elephants: using epidemiology to better understand stereotypic behavior of African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) and Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) in North American zoos.* PLoS ONE 2016. doi: pone.0144276.

Haspeslagh et al 2013 *A survey of foot problems, stereotypic behaviour and floor type in Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) in European zoos in Animal Welfare* 22(4):437-443 DOI:10.7120/09627286.22.4.437

Mason, G. J. 1991. *Stereotypes and suffering.* *Behavioural Processes*, 25(2-3), 103–115. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0376-6357\(91\)90013-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0376-6357(91)90013-P)

Kurt F & Garaï M. 2001. *Stereotypes in captive Asian elephants- a symptom of social isolation.* *Scientific Progress Reports in: A Research Update of Elephants and Rhinos. Proceedings of the International Elephant and Rhino Research Symposium, Vienna June 7-11,2001.* pp.57-63

Mason G. J. 1991. *Stereotypes: a critical review.* *Animal Behaviour*, 41:1015-1037

Romero LM. 2004. *Physiological stress in ecology: lessons from biomedical research.* *TRENDS in Ecology and Evolution*, 19(5):249-255

Bondi CO, Rodriguez G, Gould GG, Frazer A & Morilak DA. 2008. *Chronic unpredictable stress induces a cognitive deficit and anxiety-like behavior in rats that is prevented by chronic antidepressant drug treatment.* *Neuropsychopharmacology*, 33:320-331

of their brain.² Stereotypy, which reflects dysregulation in the brain's motor control systems, has been observed in both humans and non-human animals.

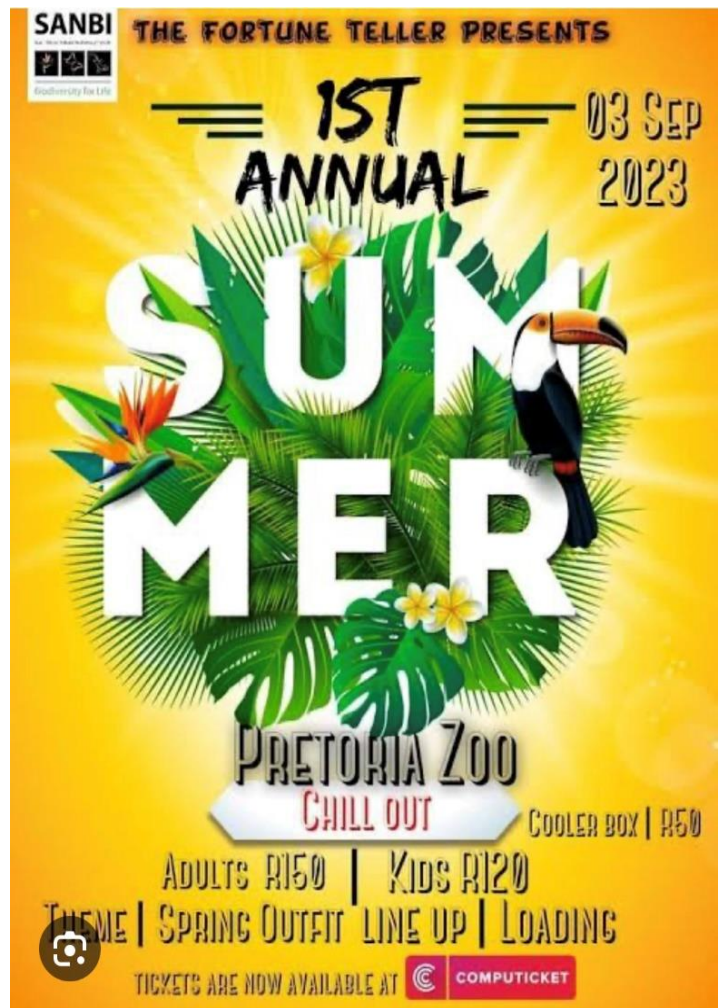
The aforementioned post on TikTok, with its one billion subscribers, contradicts SANBI's [commitment](#) to science and technology.

While members of PREN can forgive the comments of an uneducated visitor to the zoo, they cannot ignore the fact that the board of the South African National Biodiversity Institute condones the conditions under which a captive Elephant is forced to endure. It is for this reason that on the 28th of August 2023, members of the Pro Elephant Network wrote an [URGENT letter](#) of concern about the wellbeing and welfare of Charlie at the National Zoological Gardens in South Africa.

Concern for Charlie was expressed in light of the fact that the zoo is utilized for party events where alcohol is served and DJs present a line-up of music which lasts for several hours. This is not appropriate for animals that are forcibly held in captivity.



² Jacobs et al, Putative Neural Consequences of Captivity for Elephants and Cetaceans, 2021 Available at the link [Publication/354673378 Putative neural consequences of captivity for elephants and cetaceans](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psc.2021.08.001)



PREN members note that, despite raising concerns in previous correspondence, numerous other events have continued to be held at the Pretoria Zoo in September and October 2023.

Did the Zoo conduct any precautionary welfare assessment on the impacts of loud music on the animals? Were precautions taken to minimise negative impacts? Were areas accurately chosen? Were impacts monitored, and recorded? Did the zoo measure sound? Did the zoo observe impacts? Were sound-reducing barriers utilized? Did the zoo's Ethics Committee evaluate all these factors before the decision to host many events was taken?

Studies have indicated that [increased visitors and noise or light levels](#) at the zoo can have a negative impact on the welfare and stress levels of animals, particularly mammals. Research confirmed that events at zoos change the behaviour of animals and that animals if allowed, [choose](#) to stay away from crowded and loud environments. In addition, Elephants are particularly vulnerable to loud noise and show avoidance behaviour if exposed to [human-caused vibrations](#) and [construction noise](#). Several [different studies](#) in Africa show how human-generated noises from drums, tins and iron sheets are used as an effective deterrent in human-elephant conflict and crop damage mitigation.

Furthermore, zoos should at least conduct credible [welfare assessments](#) and follow all the steps to effectively mitigate impacts for every species potentially affected.



If the zoo has conducted all these assessments, would they be willing to publish the assessment results and impact analysis? If instead they were not conducted, the undersigned members of PREN are requesting that future events be urgently cancelled.

Members of PREN remain deeply concerned for the welfare and well-being of Charlie held captive at the Zoological National Garden in Pretoria.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stefania Falcon'.

Stefania Falcon

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