Elephants in Japan: 2021 Update

Dear friends,

Hanako, the Asian elephant, spent over 60 years of her life, totally alone, in a tiny, barren concrete enclosure at a Tokyo zoo. When we discovered her plight in 2016, her tragic story captured the world's attention. Even more tragically, in May 2016, just as we were making some positive changes towards her welfare, Hanako died. Nevertheless, her legacy lives on through our advocacy for Japan's remaining captive elephants.

In Hanako's memory, we launched **Elephants in Japan: In Memory of Hanako** on August 12, 2017: World Elephant Day. This update summarizes our efforts since that date, the ongoing plight of captive elephants in Japan (with a strong focus on those in solitary confinement), and our vision for the future.

We remain immensely grateful for your support.

Ulara Nakagawa
Founder of Elephants in Japan

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Miyako the solitary elephant at Utsunomiya Zoo, Japan.

An Update from Elephant Biologist Dr. Keith Lindsay

Since my report on Japan's solitary elephants was released, I have been encouraged by the implementation of measures to improve elephant welfare in Japan. However, much more can and should be done to better the lives of captive elephants in the country. My recommendations from 2017 remain relevant today.

If they are to play any justifiable role in the 21st century, all zoos must make significant changes to their mandate, moving away from exhibition for casual public entertainment to achieve biologically meaningful animal welfare, genuinely informative education on the natural lives of wild species, and meaningful support for in-situ conservation initiatives. The Japanese Association of Zoos and Aquariums (JAZA) and relevant government ministries should develop guidelines for elephant management in consultation with internationally established elephant biologists and welfare experts.

Elephant enclosures must be increased substantially in size and environmental complexity, to allow the voluntary formation of social groups appropriate for both males and females, and to provide the mental stimulation afforded by freely chosen opportunities for foraging and movement. All solitary elephants, especially at substandard facilities, must be moved so they can join with others and their exhibits should be closed. Since it is ultimately impossible for any captive facility in locations outside elephants' natural range to provide appropriate and acceptable living conditions, the importing and breeding of elephants for a life in captivity, for any reason, must be discontinued.

Moreover, the development of **true elephant sanctuaries** in Japan, where elephants can be allowed to live out their final days in relatively humane surroundings, merits serious consideration while the keeping of elephants is gradually phased out entirely.

Dr. Keith Lindsay
Elephant Biologist and Author of
"Solitary Elephants in Japan" report

Updates on the Elephants

Since the publication of **Solitary Elephants in Japan**, *4 of our 14 campaign elephants have died:*

Hanako/Hana
(Asian, F) died aged 46 at the Fukuoka City Zoo in 2017. She was unable to stand, and suffered from foot-related illness. She had lived alone for 5 years.

Izumi
(Asian, F) died aged 61 at the Kiryugaoka Zoo in 2017, due to her inability to stand. She had lived alone for 56 years.

Hiroko
(Asian, F) died aged 48 in 2018 at the Tennoji Zoo, due to leg or foot issues. She had lived alone for 9 years.

Himeko
(Asian, F) died aged 43 at the Himeji City Zoo in 2020. She had been suffering from foot-related illness. She had lived alone for 26 years.

A fifth elephant had already passed away by the time we launched our campaign:

Merry (Asian, F) died aged 52 at the Ikeda Zoo in 2016 due to poor foot health. She had lived alone for 50 years.

Today, 12 elephants live in social isolation in Japan. Seven elephants featured in our campaign report, along with five other elephants we have since identified, remain solitary:

Miyako
(Asian, F), aged 48, lives at the Utsunomiya Zoo. She has been alone for 48 years.

Sunny
(Asian, F), aged 42, lives at the Nomi Ishikawa Zoo. She has been alone for 32 years.

Fuko
(Asian, F), aged 42, lives at the Nagano Chausuyama Zoo. She has been alone for 12 years.

Teru
(Asian, F), aged 43, lives at the Yuki Park Zoo. She has been alone for 21 years.

Hamako
(Asian, F), aged 50, lives at the Hamamatsu City Zoo. She has been alone for 13 years.

Mary
(Asian, F), aged 31, lives at the Tokushima City Zoo. She has been alone for 13 years.

Fuku-Chan
(Asian, F), aged 23, lives at the Fukuyama City Zoo. She has been alone for 20 years. Note: Fuku-Chan has tuberculosis, an infectious illness, and cannot be moved to another zoo nor can another elephant be brought to her zoo.

Fujiko
(Asian, F), aged 53, lives at the Okazaki-City Higashi Koen Zoo. She has been alone for 39 years. Fujiko moved to the zoo from the Fukuyama City Zoo, home to Fuku-Chan, in 1982. Her keeper of over 35 years **retired** in 2019.

Midori
(Asian, F), aged 21, lives at the Miyazaki City Phoenix Zoo. She has been alone for 7 years since the sudden death of the male elephant, Taiyo, in 2014. In 2018, Midori was lent to the Kobe City Zoo to breed with their male Asian elephant, Mac. Midori returned to her home zoo one year later.

Mao
(African, F), aged 19, lives alone at the Morioka Zoo. She has been alone since the 2018 death of her male companion Tarou. The zoo is attempting to artificially **inseminate** her.

Oshi
(African, F), aged 50, lives at the Izu Animal Kingdom. Oshi shows strong stereotypical behaviour.

Lala
(African, F) aged 39 lives alone at the Tohoku Safari Park. She has been alone for 3 years.

Several zoos in Japan have two or more elephants, but in many cases they are housed separately from one another, meaning that in practice the number of solitary elephants is higher than the 12 mentioned above. For example, one of our profiled elephants and his ostensible companion are occasionally allowed to interact, but usually remain isolated:

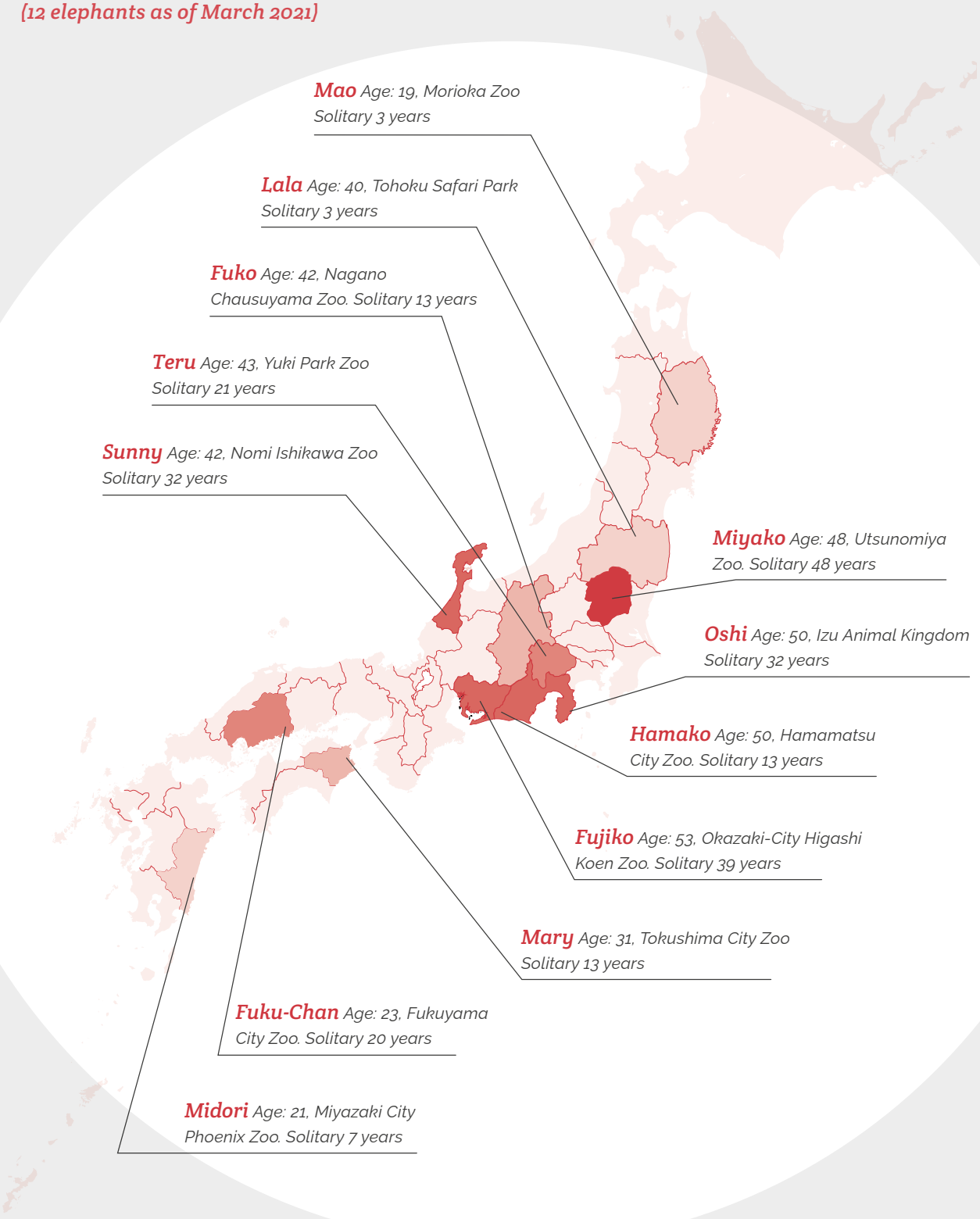
Mac (Asian, M), aged 24, and **Zuze** (Asian, F), aged 30, live at the Kobe City Zoo. While both elephants remain physically separated, they now have intermittent social opportunities with one another. From 2018 to 2019, the zoo tried to breed Mac with Midori, who was borrowed from another facility.

One of our living campaign elephants is no longer fully solitary:
Mito
(Asian, F), aged 49, lives at the Kyoto City Zoo. After over a decade of solitude, she now shares her space with four juvenile elephants.

Mito (middle) at the Kyoto City Zoo, August 2020 - © Kyoto City Zoo with kind permission

Solitary Captive Elephants in Japan

(12 elephants as of March 2021)



Note: This information regarding the status of elephants in Japan is up to date as of March 2021, and may change as elephants are relocated, die, etc.

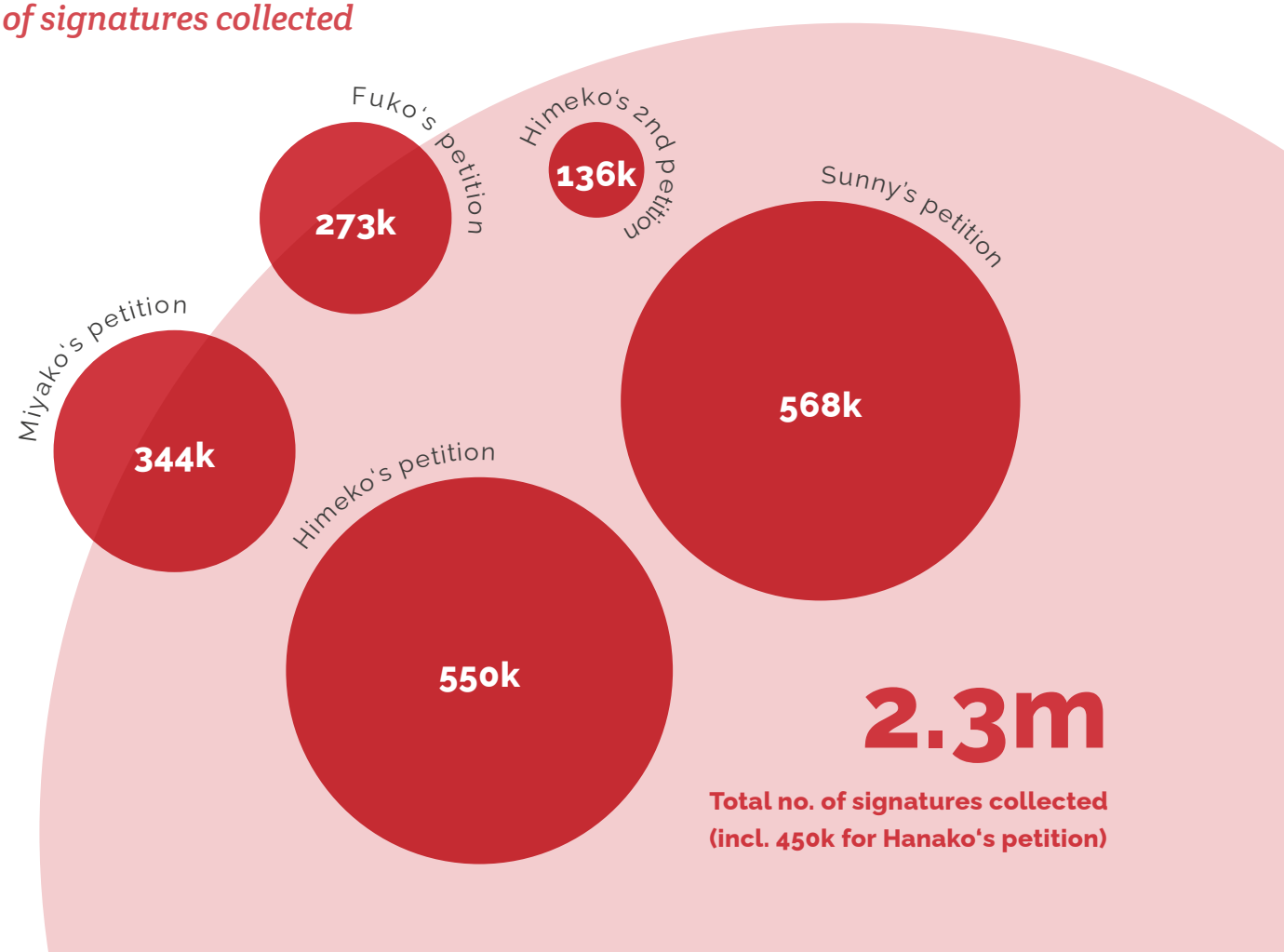
Petitions

To date, Elephants in Japan has collected over 2.3 million petition signatures from people endorsing the need to improve captive elephant welfare in Japan. The petitions for our top 5 solitary elephant campaigns are detailed below.

1. Our **petition for Miyako** was delivered to Utsunomiya City Council, Tochigi Prefecture and Utsunomiya City Zoo in June 2018.
2. Our **petition for Sunny** was delivered to Ishikawa Prefecture and Ishikawa Zoo in January 2019.
3. Our **petition for Fuko** has over 273k signatures. Delivery pending.

   We did not do a petition for Teru due to updates of significant improvements at this zoo.
4. Our **petition for Himeko** was delivered to Himeji City Hall, JAZA and Himeji City Zoo in October 2020.
5. Our **petition urging Himeji City Zoo** to end the keeping of elephants by not acquiring additional animals was delivered to the zoo and JAZA in November 2020. The zoo subsequently confirmed they will not aquire additional elephants to replace Himeko.

No. of signatures collected



Impact

To date, Elephants in Japan's activities have had a notable impact on captive elephant welfare in Japan. In late 2017, the Japan Association of Zoos and Aquariums (JAZA) stated that it will work to **bring together solitary elephants** wherever possible. Furthermore, in 2020 the association said it was **establishing a set of voluntary guidelines** for its member zoos, the first such standards in the nation's history. The aim of the recommendations outlined in the new guidelines is to reduce stress on the animals and to make their environments closer to their natural habitats. Several zoos in the country with solitary captive elephants have already begun to make significant welfare changes.

For instance, in February 2019, the Ishikawa Zoo introduced feeding challenges, water activities, and sand enrichment in **Sunny's enclosures**. In addition, she can now go in and out of the exhibit as she pleases during the day. The zoo is committed to further improving Sunny's wellbeing and remains open to our suggestions and advice.

Over the past few years, the Yuki Park Zoo has continually made improvements to **Teru's** exhibit by working with animal science students. They have introduced feeding challenges and built a sand box to reduce boredom. In 2019, they announced a massive refurbishment project for the elephant enclosure in the near future. The zoo has also committed to phase out their exhibit when Teru dies.q

Elephant-free trend

The Yuki Park Zoo is part of a growing list of zoos that have decided to go "elephant-free." The Kiryugaoka and Inokashira Park Zoos, once home to, respectively, solitary elephants Izumi and Hanako, have closed their elephant exhibits permanently. The Himeji City Zoo has also informed us that it has no intention to acquire new elephants in their present facility following the death of Himeko, the solitary elephant. The Ikeda Zoo, once home to Merry, has shut down its exhibit and turned it into an art installation memorial display. The Obihiro Zoo, where elephant Nana died earlier this year, has discussed an elephant-free future.

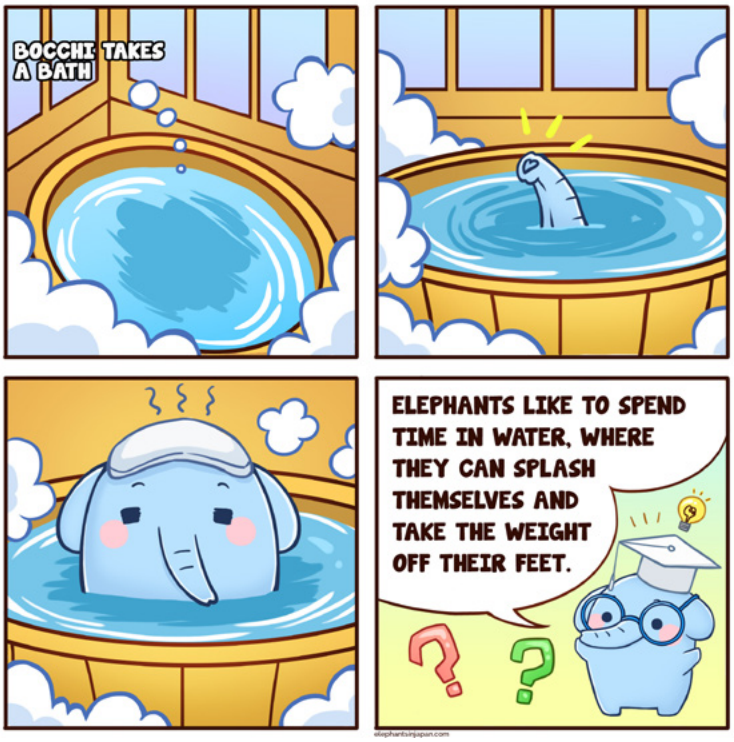
Zoos in Japan that have indicated they will not replace their resident elephant when they expire:

1. Kujukushima Zoo & Botanical Gardens/Mori Kirara (Hanako, died 2016)
2. Inokashira Zoo (Hanako, died 2016)
3. Kiryugaoka Zoo (Izumi, died 2017)
4. Obihiro Zoo (Nana, died 2020)
5. Himeji City Zoo (Himeko, died 2020)
6. Yuki Park Zoo (after Teru dies; 2 others have already died)

Continuing Challenges

Despite the progress we have made, much work remains to be done to create a better future for elephants in Japan. Many elephants continue to live alone. Many more remain in small, barren, substandard enclosures. In January 2020, Japan's oldest elephant, Nana (Asian, F), died aged 59 at the Obihiro Zoo. Having lived alone for the past 24 years, she had been unable to stand for weeks prior to her passing.

In a worrying trend, many Japanese zoos show little recognition of the ongoing problems and are maintaining plans for shipping in elephants from Asia. Notwithstanding international legislation and concerns limiting wild elephant imports, Japanese zoos are finding loopholes that allow them to bring new elephants into captivity. In 2018, the Sapporo Maruyama Zoo imported four elephants from Myanmar, opening a new elephant house the following spring. **Zoocheck** participated in an effort to stop this transfer. However, a signed agreement was already finalized by the time they became involved. This deal had some precedent in the Kyoto City Zoo's acquisition of four new elephants from Laos several years earlier.



Our campaign mascot "Bocchi" will inform and educate on basic elephant needs.

Since then, the Fukuoka Zoo, once home to the now-deceased Hana, has **announced** plans to import four elephants from Myanmar. The Tennoji Zoo, once home to Hiroko, has also expressed interest in acquiring new elephants. Elephants in Japan will continue to support efforts to prevent further such transfers.

Fundamentally, the lack of understanding between international elephant experts and the zoo community in Japan must be bridged.

Elephants in Japan will work to close this divide and to inform and empower Japanese citizens so they can better advocate for positive changes to elephant keeping.

Looking Ahead

Elephants in Japan will continue to:

Investigate and document the conditions in which elephants in captivity are kept

Lobby for immediate and short term improvements to captive elephant health and welfare

Push to end elephant importation and breeding

Work to raise awareness among the public, members of the zoo industry and policy-makers at all levels of government about the critical requirements for improved welfare of captive elephant and to facilitate the eventual phase out of elephant keeping in traditional Japanese zoos

Where possible, Elephants in Japan will work cooperatively with individual zoos, the Japanese Association of Zoos and Aquariums, elephant and animal welfare experts, members of academia and elected officials and bureaucrats at all levels of government.

Elephants in Japan's eventual goal is the establishment of an elephant sanctuary in the subtropical, species-appropriate climate of southern Japan, providing the highest quality of life possible for the country's remaining elephants. Our vision is to better the lives of elephants currently held in captivity in Japan and to work towards changing the paradigm of captive wild animal welfare in the country.

Kyushu - The temperatures on Japan's southern island averages 9°C in winter and 30°C in summer.

Elephants in Japan

In Memory of Hanako

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