

# PAWS Sanctuary Announces Death of Toka – One of the Oldest African Elephants in North America

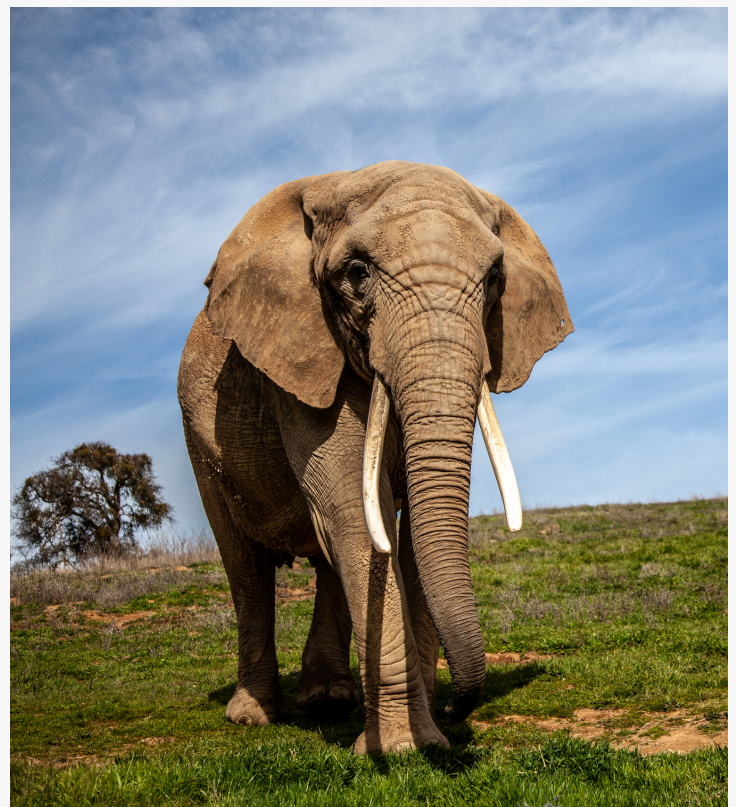
*Beloved elephant dies at age 56, following very brief illness.*

SAN ANDREAS, CA, UNITED STATES, May 28, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) today announced the death of African elephant Toka following a very brief illness. She was cared for at PAWS' 2,300-acre ARK 2000 sanctuary in San Andreas, California, home to rescued and retired captive wild animals from circuses, zoos, and the exotic pet trade. At age 56, Toka was one of the oldest African elephants in North America.

"Toka spent her days at PAWS immersed in nature, enjoying the warm California weather and a spacious environment where she could express natural elephant behaviors and live with dignity," said Ed Stewart, PAWS Co-founder and President of the Board of Directors. "PAWS was proud to provide Toka with expert daily and veterinary care, and we were honored to have her as a cherished member of the PAWS family for nearly 13 years."

Toka was born into a wild elephant family in Mozambique, Africa. She was captured at approximately two years old – one of many calves orphaned after their mothers were slaughtered in culls. In nature, female elephants remain with their mothers and family groups for life.

At just four years old, Toka was sent to the Toronto Zoo, where she spent the next 39 years. After the zoo decided to end its elephant program, the Toronto City Council voted to relocate the remaining elephants to PAWS. Toka arrived at the sanctuary in October 2013, along with Thika



Toka at the PAWS Sanctuary.

and the late Iringa.

Toka was easily recognized by her long, elegant tusks and quiet presence. She especially loved bananas, which were known to send her into a blissful state, and she enjoyed a good mud bath, in which she would happily roll and splash.

Elephants are highly intelligent, long-lived animals whose complex physical and social needs cannot be fully met in captivity. In the wild, female African elephants commonly live into their 50s and even 60s, with some individuals exceeding 65 years of age. In captivity, the median life expectancy for a female African elephant is only 39.4 years, according to the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

"Everyone at PAWS will miss this remarkable elephant," said Stewart. "She was deeply loved by PAWS' caregivers, staff, and supporters, and her loss will be felt far beyond the sanctuary."

PAWS continues to care for five elephants at the sanctuary, along with big cats, bears, small wild cats, monkeys, and other captive wild animals.

For more information about PAWS, please visit [www.pawsweb.org](http://www.pawsweb.org).

About the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

Founded in 1984, the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) provides lifetime care for captive wild animals rescued or retired from circuses, zoos, and the exotic "pet" trade. PAWS' 2,300-acre sanctuary located in San Andreas, California, is home to elephants, bears, big cats, small wild cats, monkeys, and others. PAWS is accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries and a founding member of the Big Cat Sanctuary Alliance.

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