



PETA Factsheet

Elephant Incidents in the United States

The following is a partial listing of dangerous incidents involving captive elephants in the United States since 1990. These incidents have resulted in 15 human deaths and more than 135 injuries to humans. Contact PETA for documentation.

January 14, 2011/Knoxville, Tennessee: A keeper at the Knoxville Zoo was crushed against a wall by an 8,000-pound African elephant named Edie while she was feeding the animal. Medics rushed the woman to a hospital, where she died.

July 1, 2010/Toledo, Ohio: A keeper at the Toledo Zoo was critically injured by a 7-year-old, 4,000-pound African elephant named Louie while he was interacting with the animal. Louie charged the man several times and struck him with his tusks. A zoo visitor reported, "The man was body-checked into the iron bars [by the elephant]," and added that the victim was holding his ribs and blood was streaming from the top of his head and down his face. Emergency crews rushed the man to the Toledo Medical Center, where he remained for approximately a month recovering from injuries that included two punctured lungs and broken ribs.

April 27, 2010/Lynchburg, Virginia: An elephant named Viola escaped from the Cole Bros. Circus. She bolted from handlers and ran directly past a line of people waiting to buy tickets, sending some running toward the parking lot. Viola injured her shoulder and broke a toenail when she slid in the mud and fell into a steep ravine. She was on the loose for approximately 30 minutes before being recaptured. The circus claimed that the elephant had been spooked by a rabbit.

April 2010: According to a USDA memo, an elephant named Isa with Carson & Barnes Circus stepped on a trainer/handler. The trainer sustained injuries that required a foot splint and crutches and kept him off work for a few days.

April 9, 2010/Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania: An animal handler with the Hamid Circus was kicked and thrown about 20 feet by an African elephant named Dumbo between performances at the Irem Shrine Circus. The handler died at the scene from multiple traumatic injuries. The elephant had been leased from Joe Frisco's Wonderful World of Animals.

February 6, 2010/Columbia, South Carolina: According to *The State*, "A startled elephant took a wrong turn backstage and broke through the main prop door leading into the Colonial Life Arena during the afternoon pre-show for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus About 100 spectators on the floor watching the pre-show saw the elephant break through the door toward them and rumble around the performance area, just a few feet away." The pre-show ended early as a result of the incident.

November 4, 2009/Enid, Oklahoma: A 4,500-pound African elephant named Kamba escaped from the Family Fun Circus and collided with an SUV on U.S. 81. The elephant was reportedly about to enter the circus tent to perform when she was startled by someone opening the tent flap and then ran off the fairgrounds and onto the highway. The passenger of the SUV complained of head, left knee, and left hip pain as a result of hitting the passenger door when the driver swerved to avoid the elephant. Kamba sustained a broken tusk, bruising to the trunk, and cuts and scrapes to her left front leg and body. Kamba, who was leased by the circus from exhibitor Doug Terranova, had escaped from another circus the previous year (see June 5, 2008/WaKeeney, Kansas).

March 7, 2009/Indianapolis, Indiana: At least 15 children and one adult were injured when an elephant who was being used to give rides at the Murat Shrine Circus became startled, stumbling and knocking over the scaffolding stairway leading to the elephant ride. People on the elephant's back and others standing on, under, and around the scaffolding were injured.

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Their injuries were treated on the scene. The Shriners had leased the elephant from exhibitor Will Davenport, dba Maximus Tons of Fun.

June 5, 2008/WaKeeney, Kansas: Tornado sirens spooked two elephants who were preparing to perform with the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus. The animals bolted from their tethers and ran through town, causing minor property damage and frightening residents. One woman claimed that she had been chased into her garage. The elephants were pursued by police, sheriff's officers, firefighters, and circus workers. One elephant was shot three times with a tranquilizer gun in an effort by authorities to slow the animal down. The elephants were on the loose for approximately three hours before they were recaptured and loaded onto trucks. The circus had leased the elephants from exhibitor Doug Terranova.

March 6, 2007/Apache Junction, Arizona: An employee with Enterprising Elephants suffered several broken ribs and a dislocated jaw when an elephant became spooked and ran over him at the Arizona Renaissance Festival. The man was rushed to a hospital where he spent a few days.

July 21, 2006/Hohenwald, Tennessee: A staff person at The Elephant Sanctuary was killed by an Asian elephant who was believed to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. As the woman moved to look at the elephant's apparently sore eye, the animal spun around, knocked her down, and then stepped on her, killing her instantly. Another employee who tried to intervene sustained a minor injury to his foot.

March 5, 2006/Marlborough, Massachusetts: An Asian elephant named Minnie at the Commerford Petting Zoo injured two employees while giving rides at the Best Western Royal Plaza Trade Center. As children were being loaded onto her back, she became agitated and suddenly swung her head toward the two employees, shifting her weight and pinning them against the loading ramp. An eyewitness reported that one of the employees had provoked the elephant by striking her in the face. One man sustained a chest injury and the other a broken arm. Both were taken by ambulance to the hospital. Two bystanders sustained bruises. Minnie had been involved in at least three previous dangerous incidents.

December 12, 2005/San Juan, Puerto Rico: Two elephants with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus sustained cuts and scrapes from arena seats after becoming startled by a barking dog and running amok during a performance in Puerto Rico.

August 25, 2005/Mt. Pleasant Township, Pennsylvania: An Asian elephant named Jewel who was owned by Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus and touring with Wambold's Circus Menagerie suddenly wrapped her trunk around a woman's wrist and yanked her. The woman was reaching out toward the elephant from a crowd of people who were feeding the animal at the county fair. The woman was treated at an emergency room for a sprain and possibly torn ligaments.

April 13, 2005/Polk City, Florida: Ringling elephant handler David Mannes was airlifted to a medical center to treat a fractured pelvis and a soft tissue wound to his arm after he was knocked down and kicked by an Asian elephant named Tova while he was feeding the elephants at Ringling's breeding compound.

January 31, 2005/Fort Wayne, Indiana: An elephant trainer with Tarzan Zerbini Circus was trampled to death by one of the Asian elephants as the animals were being loaded into a trailer following performances at the Mizpah Shrine Circus.

November 2004/McHenry County, Illinois: Two employees at the Hawthorn Corporation's circus-training facility were injured by an elephant. One of the employees was hospitalized and then moved to a convalescent home as a result of the injuries, and the other was unable to work for four days.

October 16, 2004/Tuscaloosa, Alabama: A participant in a fraternity-house event broke his hand when an elephant, apparently startled when a band started playing, swung her head and knocked him to the ground with her trunk. The elephants were provided by Frisco's Elephants.

August 29, 2004/El Paso, Texas: An elephant with the George Carden Circus attacked an arena worker following a performance at the El Maida Shrine Circus. The elephant knocked the man down, threw him into a wall, and pinned him against a fence. He sustained a dislocated shoulder, a torn rotator cuff, and a nerve injury, which required surgery for repair and reconstruction and resulted in more than \$15,000 in medical bills.

July 4, 2004/Clinton, Iowa: An African elephant named Nosey, with the Liebel Family Circus, attacked a circus worker who was tending to a water dish. The elephant hit the worker with her tusk, lifting him off his feet and propelling him down an incline. The man was rushed to the hospital and received stitches for a head injury.

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June 1, 2004/Vallejo, California: A veteran elephant trainer at Six Flags Marine World was gored and critically injured as he stood next to a 7,000-pound African elephant named Misha (see June 22, 2001/Vallejo, California, and April 10, 1990/Oakdale, California). The elephant knocked him down with her trunk and ran her tusk into the trainer's back, penetrating all the way through his abdomen.

July 18, 2003/Indianapolis, Indiana: An African elephant named Ivory attacked a trainer at the Indianapolis Zoo, causing a leg injury that required surgery. Ivory was agitated when she heard her 3-year-old calf cry out. The zoo, which uses circus-style training, had removed the calf for training.

March 2, 2003/Muskegon, Michigan: A 9,000-pound African elephant performing with Jordan World Circus at the Shrine Circus escaped from a tent shortly before a performance and was recaptured 15 minutes later in a busy downtown area.

December 15, 2002/Miami, Florida: Flora, an African elephant, went on a rampage at Miami MetroZoo, knocking and kicking one elephant trainer 15 feet into a pile of rocks and injuring a second one who tried to stop the attack. The incident occurred as the trainer was demonstrating to 50 zoo visitors how the zoo dominates elephants. The zookeeper was critically injured, with broken shoulders, a broken arm, a bruised brain, and a ruptured spleen.

November 18, 2002/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: An African elephant at the Pittsburgh Zoo butted a zookeeper, pinned him to the ground, and crushed him to death with her head. The keeper had been prodding the elephant with a bullhook during a morning walk.

June 17, 2002/Menomonie, Wisconsin: An Asian elephant named Tory and an African elephant named Mary, performing with the Shrine Circus, bolted out of a circus tent during a show, scattering crowds. Mary hiked 2 miles through town and was recaptured at the University of Wisconsin–Stout campus when trucks blocked her escape. One child was injured, and the elephants damaged a door at the park and caused \$600 in damage to a city truck. The Shriners had contracted with George Carden Circus for the event.

March 13, 2002/Easley, South Carolina: An African elephant named Tonya, belonging to Robert Childress and used in various circuses, escaped the control of her handlers while she was being loaded into a trailer, fled into nearby woods, and was recaptured with the assistance of police. This is the fourth time that Tonya has run amok (see June 22, 2000/Washington, Pennsylvania; February 16, 1998/Mentor, Ohio; and August 30, 1997/York, Maine).

February 2002/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: An African elephant at the Pittsburgh Zoo injured a former Ringling elephant trainer who had been hired by the zoo, causing a collapsed lung and leg injuries.

October 27, 2001/Charlotte, North Carolina: Debbie and Judy, two Asian elephants leased by Hawthorn Corporation to Circus Vazquez, rampaged throughout a church. Two church members were nearly trampled, and children had to be quickly ushered to safety. The elephants crashed into the church through a glass window, broke and buckled walls and door frames, and knocked a car 15 feet, causing an estimated \$75,000 in damages. The elephants suffered cuts and bruises. Debbie had rampaged twice before (see July 10, 1995/Queens, New York, and May 19, 1995/Hanover, Pennsylvania).

August 24, 2001/Knoxville, Tennessee: A 40-year-old African elephant named Mamie became spooked, broke free from the handlers, and smashed through a metal gate while being taken on a walk at the Knoxville Zoo. One handler required five stitches for a gash on his head caused when the elephant knocked him down, and another suffered a broken rib when the elephant swiped at him.

June 22, 2001/Vallejo, California: An African elephant named Misha at Six Flags Marine World, apparently apprehensive about the daily cleaning of an artificial insemination surgery site, attacked a trainer, pushing him to the ground and into bushes.

June 10, 2001/Denver, Colorado: When a trainer dropped a barrel during a bathing demonstration at the Denver Zoo, a 6,700-pound Asian elephant named Hope became startled and went into a rampage, throwing the trainer against a wall, scattering crowds of zoogoers, and knocking over a mother and her baby in a stroller. The baby was treated at a hospital for a bump on the head, the trainer suffered cuts and bruises, a man sprained his ankle, and a woman had an asthma attack while running away from the elephant. Hope was recaptured three hours later. Hope and a baby elephant had been leased two weeks earlier from the California-based company Have Trunk Will Travel to perform daily shows during the summer.

June 22, 2000/Washington, Pennsylvania: An African elephant named Tonya traveling with Circus Hope became

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frightened when children approached her with toy horns. Tonya escaped the control of the handlers and was later led back to her tent by police officers, security personnel, and trainers. All the animals in the circus were “on edge” because of highway noise and the surface of the parking lot.

April 20, 2000/Yucca Valley, California: Barbara and Connie, two African elephants being used by the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus, escaped from the pens. One stomped down three city blocks, frightening bystanders. Authorities said that a circus employee trying to get the second elephant under control was “trampled.”

January 26, 2000/Riverview, Florida: A female African elephant named Kenya attacked and killed a trainer at the Ramos Family Circus winter compound. Kenya knocked the trainer to the ground, stepped on her, and knocked her down a second time when the woman tried to stand up. Kenya was used in the Ramos’ traveling shows and to give rides.

December 22, 1999/Madison, Wisconsin: An Asian elephant named Winkie attacked two keepers at the Henry Vilas Zoo, throwing one against the wall and grabbing the other in her mouth. The elephant has injured people at least three other times since being brought to the zoo in 1966.

October 4, 1999/Dallas, Texas: An African elephant, reportedly named Kamba, walked out of the ring in which she was performing and out into a Dallas intersection filled with spectators. It took two hours for handlers to coax her back into the arena.

May 12, 1999/Bethune, South Carolina: Flora, an African elephant with Circus Flora, grabbed a woman with her trunk as she was dismounting from a ride and threw her against a tree three times. The woman was in a body brace for three months with many broken bones and received \$468,000 as settlement of a lawsuit.

April 29, 1999/Duluth, Minnesota: An animal handler with the Tarzan Zerbini Circus (also doing business as Circus Maximus) was injured by an elephant and hospitalized in serious condition with multiple injuries.

February 21, 1999/Poughkeepsie, New York: Luna, an African elephant with the Royal Hanneford Circus, escaped the ring and charged the crowd in the middle of a performance. Luna ran through two tiers of seats, causing panic and sending spectators running for safety.

November 9, 1998/Indianapolis, Indiana: Cita, a 29-year-old African elephant at the Indianapolis Zoo, attacked a keeper after being reprimanded. She struck the keeper with her trunk, breaking several ribs.

August 27, 1998/Syracuse, New York: While carrying children on her back at a state fair, an elephant with the Commerford & Sons petting zoo panicked, knocking down and then stepping on the trainer. A 3-year-old girl was also injured after falling off the elephant. Both of the injured people were treated at a local hospital.

July 1998/Madison, Wisconsin: An Asian elephant named Winky and an African elephant named Penny injured a zookeeper at the Henry Vilas Zoo. The zookeeper was “picked up by one, thrown, and [then] knelt down upon by a second elephant.”

February 21, 1998/Indio, California: An elephant being ridden in a festival show became spooked, reared back, and bolted back to the pen, taking the “queen of the festival” with her.

February 16, 1998/Mentor, Ohio: An African elephant named Tonya panicked while in a high school hallway and forced open a door. She ran a quarter of a mile and damaged a police car before being caught outside a discount store.

August 30, 1997/York, Maine: Two African elephants fled from York Wild Kingdom when they were startled by a truck. One elephant was found in a wooded area behind neighborhood houses.

June 28, 1997/Seagoville, Texas: A 65-year-old man who entered a “storage yard for circus animals” was attacked by an elephant and suffered a broken arm and dislocated shoulder.

May 28, 1997/Gainesville, Texas: An Asian elephant named Gerry II at the Frank Buck Zoo crushed a handler to death.

October 20, 1996/Los Angeles, California: An assistant trainer was attacked by Calle, a female Asian elephant during a

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training exercise at the Los Angeles Zoo. Onlookers reported that the elephant grabbed the worker's head, knocked him down, and tried to trample him. He was taken to a nearby hospital and treated for three broken ribs and a broken collarbone.

June 14, 1996/Casper, Wyoming: An Asian elephant knocked down and repeatedly kicked a trainer. At the time of the incident, the elephant was giving rides to children. One child fell off the elephant. This elephant was performing with Jordan World Circus and is currently owned by John Cuneo.

March 5, 1996/Comfort, Texas: A high school principal suffered two broken ribs and was nearly trampled when he fell off an elephant with King Royal Circus. He had been preparing to ride the elephant in a race when the animal became upset and shook him off.

July 10, 1995/Queens, New York: Two Asian elephants with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus went on a rampage, triggering a panic among hundreds of spectators that left 12 people injured. Six spectators were hospitalized after Debbie and Frieda bolted from the circus tent and crashed into a parked car before being brought under control by a trainer.

May 19, 1995/Hanover, Pennsylvania: Debbie and Frieda, two Asian elephants with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus, rampaged at the North Hanover Mall, smashing store windows, damaging cars, and escaping into the woods. Frieda had killed Joan Scovell, 47, of New London, Connecticut, in 1985 by grabbing the woman with her trunk and throwing her down to the ground in a parking lot of the New London Mall.

February 6, 1995/Fort Wayne, Indiana: An employee of Tarzan Zerbini Circus was stepped on by an Asian elephant named Roxie while loading the elephants into a trailer. The employee suffered a crushed pelvis and was in critical condition.

October 10, 1994/Riley County, Kansas: A 3-year-old girl was feeding grass to Mickey, a 15-month-old Asian elephant at the King Royal Circus, when the elephant wrapped his trunk around her neck and attempted to pull her into the arena. The girl was treated for injuries at a local hospital.

August 20, 1994/Honolulu, Hawaii: Tyke, an African elephant with Circus International, killed a trainer and stomped and injured a circus groom and a dozen spectators. Tyke had run amok just before a performance, breaking out of the arena and leading police on a chase down several city blocks until they shot her to death with almost 100 bullets. This was the second elephant incident at the circus in as many weeks. Multiple lawsuits were filed. Tyke had rampaged twice before (see July 23, 1993/Minot, North Dakota and April 21, 1993/Altoona, Pennsylvania).

August 15, 1994/Honolulu, Hawaii: An elephant with Circus International pinned Sean Floyd, his wife, and their eight children under a fence that separated the first row of spectators from the circus rings. Floyd and his 15-year-old daughter, Rachel, suffered injuries. Suits were filed against John Cuneo and the Hawthorn Corporation, owners of the elephant, and also against Roy Yempuku, the circus promoter.

July 18, 1994/New York, New York: An African elephant with the Moscow Circus attacked a Russian translator backstage at ABC's *Live With Regis and Kathie Lee* television show. The elephant repeatedly smashed her head into the woman, pinning her to a wall and leaving her with a skull fracture, broken ribs, and a punctured lung. Lawsuits were filed against the circus, the show, and ABC for \$5 million.

July 1, 1994/Louisville, Kentucky: A man visiting the Louisville Zoological Gardens was picked up and dropped several times by an African elephant named Kenya. As a result of the man's injuries, his spleen and part of his pancreas were removed. The elephant had just finished giving rides to zoo visitors and was being led away when she wandered off and picked up the man. Zoo officials claimed that the elephant, who was normally considered calm and docile, was just "horsing around."

April 6, 1994/Salt Lake City, Utah: While giving rides to two children, an Asian elephant picked up, tossed, and stepped on an animal trainer with the Jordan Circus, breaking his arm and ribs and causing internal organ damage. Another trainer was also injured in the incident.

April 1994/Muskegon, Michigan: Three children were injured when an elephant who was giving rides at a Shrine-sponsored circus fell into the passenger loading platform, spilling the riders and bending the platform.

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February 24, 1994/Chicago, Illinois: An elephant handler suffered broken ribs, a broken sternum, a collapsed lung, and a wound on her back when she slipped under an Asian elephant who she was trying to secure. The elephant, named Shanti, had broken through some chains and ropes in the holding area at the Lincoln Park Zoo. The handler sought \$1 million in damages against the zoo.

January 30, 1994/Cleveland, Ohio: Tiani, an African elephant at the Cleveland Zoo, lunged at a keeper, gashing his head. Although zoo officials said that the elephant had never before acted so aggressively, they believe she had a “temper tantrum” as a result of being confined during a subzero cold spell.

September 1993/Vallejo, California: Radio personality Scott Stuart was posing on the back of an elephant at Marine World for a publicity photograph when the elephant ran across a public area and threw Stuart onto a cement path. The elephant was being used to give rides to children. Stuart sued the park for the injuries he suffered and was awarded \$600,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

July 23, 1993/Minot, North Dakota: Tyke, the African elephant who was killed in the August 20, 1994, incident described above, escaped from a trainer while at the North Dakota State Fair and trampled an elephant show worker, breaking two of his ribs.

July 10, 1993/Tampa, Florida: Tillie, an Asian elephant at the Lowry Park Zoo, killed a keeper by pinning her to the ground and kicking her in the chest. Several weeks before, the elephant had pushed the same keeper into a moat surrounding the elephant compound.

June 5, 1993/Fishkill, New York: An Asian elephant crushed a man to death by pinning him against a trailer in the elephant area of the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus grounds at the Fishkill Mall.

May 5, 1993/Williston, Florida: A circus trainer died of internal injuries after an Asian elephant named Reba knocked him down and stomped on his chest at a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus elephant farm.

April 21, 1993/Altoona, Pennsylvania: A female African elephant, Tyke, charged through an arena entryway during a Great American Circus performance. She ripped away part of the wall, causing \$10,000 in damage. More than 3,000 children were in the audience. One young girl suffered injuries to her ankle, and Hawthorn Corporation made a cash settlement with her parents. The elephant ran out onto an upstairs balcony and was later coaxed back by trainers.

December 16, 1992/San Antonio, Texas: An Asian elephant named Ginny killed a keeper by grabbing him and slamming him to the ground as he was leading a group of elephants into an enclosure at the San Antonio Zoo.

December 3, 1992/Cleveland, Ohio: A 4,500-pound elephant named Tribby shoved a Cleveland Metroparks Zoo employee into a wall with her head, trunk, and tusks. The keeper sustained a torn rotator cuff and received cortisone shots to alleviate the pain. Tribby had previously injured a keeper at the Pittsburgh Zoo, knocking him down and crushing his pelvis.

October 15, 1992/Bloomington, Minnesota: A handler was hospitalized for a leg injury when an Asian elephant named Bunny grabbed him with her mouth while she was giving rides to several children at a Shrine circus. One child suffered a minor leg injury.

August 31, 1992/Indianapolis, Indiana: A 3-year-old girl sustained permanent facial scarring after falling off an elephant during a ride at the Indianapolis Zoo. Three others riding with the girl also fell to the ground.

July 15, 1992/Lafayette, Indiana: Nine people were injured when they could not get out of the way as elephants in the Tarzan Zerbini International Circus collided and toppled a barricade at a shopping center.

February 1, 1992/Palm Bay, Florida: Janet (aka Kelly), an Asian elephant with the Great American Circus, went on a rampage while carrying children on her back. She injured 12 people and threw a police officer to the ground before being shot and killed by police.

December 1991/Houston, Texas: Indu, an Asian elephant at the Houston Zoo, attacked a trainer and broke his collarbone and four ribs.

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July 1991/Portland, Oregon: Tamba, an Asian elephant at Metro Washington Park Zoo, knocked down the same trainer she had slammed against a wall seven months previously, this time fracturing his skull. See December 7, 1990/Portland, Oregon.

March 15, 1991/San Diego, California: A keeper was killed by an Asian elephant at the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

January 12, 1991/Oakland, California: An animal handler who was cleaning an elephant pen at the Oakland Zoo was kicked to death by an African elephant named Smokey.

December 7, 1990/Portland, Oregon: A trainer at the Metro Washington Park Zoo was slammed against the steel-clad corner of a concrete door by an Asian elephant named Tamba and sustained severe head and brain injuries.

October 1990/Indianapolis, Indiana: A father and his 2-year-old son fell off an African elephant named Kubwa during a ride at the Indianapolis Zoo. The man suffered a dislocated hip and a severe groin injury.

July 8, 1990/Reading, Pennsylvania: During a Great American Circus show, an elephant attacked a trainer and went on a rampage, panicking the crowd and injuring one man.

June 21, 1990/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida: An Asian elephant named Carol with the Hanneford Family Circus kicked and sat on a handler after being startled by a passing car. The man was crushed to death.

June 1990/Oakland, California: An African elephant named Lisa attacked a keeper at the Oakland Zoo, ripping off her index finger and the end of her thumb.

April 10, 1990/Oakdale, California: An African elephant from Marine World Africa USA in Vallejo threw the passengers off her back while she was giving rides at a private party in the Oakdale area. The elephant began spinning and bumping into cars before she was brought under control. One passenger fell and was dragged 40 feet before being freed.

March 19, 1990/Loxahatchee, Florida: An African elephant named JoJo injured a handler at Lion Country Safari when she lifted him with her trunk, spun him around over her head, threw him to the ground twice, and gored him. The handler had five crushed ribs and a damaged liver and required 23 pints of blood.

February 13, 1990/San Francisco, California: An elephant keeper at the San Francisco Zoo suffered a fractured back when he was pushed into a moat by an Asian elephant named Tinkerbelle.