



ELEPHANT AID INTERNATIONAL
One World...One Elephant at a Time

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AT 39, BO THE ELEPHANT CELEBRATES LIFE, FREEDOM, AND CHOICE

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This month, Elephant Aid International (EAI) is celebrating Bo's 39th birthday—honoring a playful, gentle, and quietly strong elephant who found freedom at Elephant Refuge North America (ERNA).

Bo's life story reflects both the challenges faced by captive elephants and the profound changes that are possible when thoughtful, individualized care, space, and choice are finally offered. Born on January 22, 1987, at Busch Gardens in Tampa, Florida, Bo entered the world in captivity. Before his first birthday, he was sold into the entertainment industry, where he spent the next 34 years performing—first with Animal Actors of Hollywood, then for three decades with the George Carden Circus.

Like many elephants in entertainment, Bo's life was tightly managed by people. His movements, diet, social interactions, and daily routines were never his own to decide. At five years old, Bo was a healthy, rambunctious youngster labeled “difficult to manage.” In an attempt to curb aggression, he was castrated and placed with a herd of female elephants. While this decision was rooted in human convenience, it did allow Bo to develop social bonds that later helped him navigate life in a herd—though his environment remained far removed from anything natural.

In 2021, Bo's story took a rare and hopeful turn. He arrived at Elephant Refuge North America as its first elephant resident, following a voluntary decision by a circus owner who believed Bo deserved a better life. That decision marked the beginning of Bo's retirement—and the first time he was given true autonomy.

ERNA's 850-acre habitat, with its forests, pastures, ponds, and miles of trails, offered Bo something entirely new: choice. In the early days, that freedom came with a learning curve. Having never needed to navigate a large landscape or make daily decisions for himself, Bo had to discover how to simply be an elephant.

Over time, he did exactly that. Bo began exploring on his own terms, creating well-worn paths through the habitat, finding favorite feeding spots, and spending time in the ponds and clay-rich soil that support his physical well-being. He formed close bonds with fellow elephants Tarra and, later, Mundi, as well as with canine companions Mala and Samie and his caregiving team.

According to Elephant Aid International Founder and CEO Carol Buckley, one of Bo's most meaningful changes has been subtle but profound. "Bo continues to grow, developing the confidence to explore the vast habitat," she says. "His most significant shift is that he no longer returns to the barn to sleep. Instead, we find him resting throughout the habitat—sleeping under the stars while nocturnal wildlife moves around him."

For elephants, the ability to rest deeply and safely is a powerful indicator of well-being. Choosing where to sleep—beneath a tree, near water, or in open pasture—is an expression of trust and comfort that Bo was never able to experience before.

As Bo turns 39, Elephant Aid International celebrates not just his birthday but his continued growth, resilience, and the quiet joy of finally living on his own terms.

To learn more about Bo and Elephant Refuge North America, visit <http://elephantaidthinternational.org/projects/elephant-refuge-north-america/>

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About Elephant Aid International (EAI): EAI is a nonprofit organization that develops innovative approaches to caring for and managing elephants worldwide. We unchain elephants in Asia, teach humane methods of training and handling elephants, and provide a natural habitat refuge for retired elephants in the U.S. Learn more at <http://elephantaidthinternational.org>.