



PHOTOS BY RICKY CARIOTI — THE WASHINGTON POST

**National Zoo visitors watch Kandula, a 7-year-old male elephant who was born at the zoo, perform demonstrations during Asian Elephant Day.**

# Event Explores All Things Elephant

## Visitors Get the Lowdown on the Mammal's Upkeep

By MICHAEL S. ROSENWALD  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Children ask lots of questions at zoos. One recurrent query at the National Zoo is perhaps the smelliest: How much poop do elephants produce every day? Answer: About 100 pounds.

And here goes one now. "Daddy, eww," a little girl says. Daddy remains silent, perhaps in awe.

The father and daughter were watching the animals bathe Saturday at the zoo, which was celebrating Asian Elephant Day with caregiving tutorials, special exhibits, sari demonstrations, Sri Lankan music and even elephant dung commerce, including \$7

pads of paper made from 75 percent recycled elephant poop. (The manufacturer's name is Mr. Ellie Pooh. Its products don't stink. Really.)

Elephants, perhaps because of their sheer size, arouse the imaginations of children. Andrew Ramos, 7, of Williamsburg got his first up-close look at an elephant. "I think it weighs like 100 pounds, maybe like 9,000," he said. "I think they are bigger than like a hundred persons. I like them."

About 25 feet away in the Elephant House, a 9,000-pound — Andrew was right! — Sri Lankan elephant named Shanthi was watered down with a hose that looked like one used by fire-

fighters. Trainers soaped her up, scrubbing the suds in with long brooms. A narrator with a microphone provided color commentary, offering answers to questions about elephant care and bodily functions.

The elephants are bathed every day. The bathing helps strengthen the bond between animal and trainer, the zoo said. Trainers also get good looks to see whether the animal's skin is healthy. The elephants pee a lot, about 50 gallons a day, because they don't have sweat glands. Why do elephants, after taking a bath, throw dirt on themselves? Easy: That's how they dry off. Seems somewhat logical given the size of towels they would need.

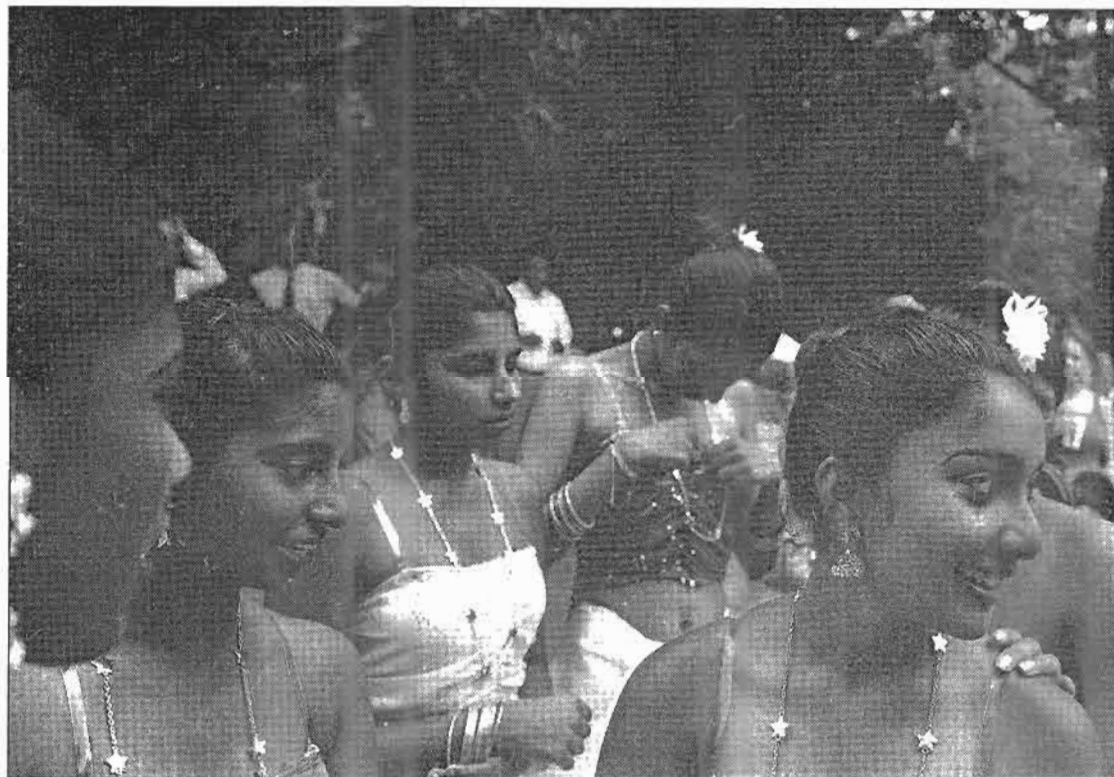
Soon Slayman was watching with her granddaughters Hattie Ballantine, 3, and Lily Ballantine, 5. She offered thoughts on what was so captivating about the animals.

"They don't seem menacing," Slayman said. "They seem so agile. They move so gently."

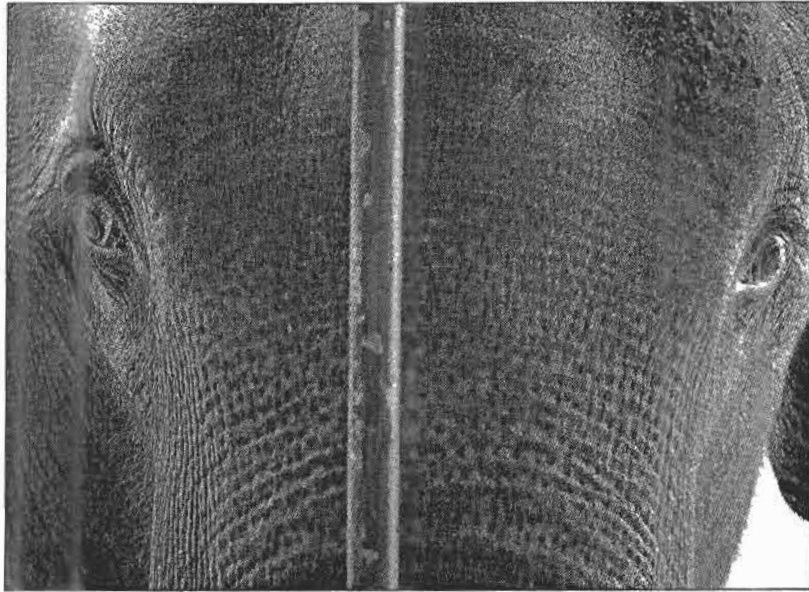
Sri Lankan officials are proud of them. In Sri Lanka, elephants are revered as symbols of daily and religious life. An estimated 4,400 elephants are in the country, according to the Sri Lanka Department of Wildlife Conservation.

The country gave Shanthi, an orphan, to the National Zoo in 1976. Shanthi gave birth to Kandula, a male, in 2001.

"This is our culture," said Jaliya C. Wickramasuriya, Sri Lanka's ambassador to the United States. "Elephants are very important."



Dehara Weeraman, 8, above, performed with a Sri Lankan youth dance troupe. Other events celebrated Sri Lankan culture, in which elephants are revered as symbols of daily and religious life. At left, other dancers from the youth troupe prepare for a performance at the zoo. From left are Amandi Soyza, 17, Natalia Perera, 16, Amali Perera, 14, Indima Fernando, 18, and Dinali Weeraman, 13.



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### **Up Close With Elephants at National Zoo**

**Kandula, a 7-year-old elephant who was born at the National Zoo, peers through an enclosure at crowds gathered to see the elephants during Asian Elephant Day. The event featured performances by Sri Lankan dancers and other activities. Story, C5.**