



Fall 8-12-2014

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### Recommended Citation

Winthrop University, "Alumnus, Zookeeper Celebrates World Elephant Day at Memphis Zoo" (2014).  
*Winthrop News 2014*. 138.  
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# Alumnus, Zookeeper Celebrates World Elephant Day at Memphis Zoo

## Quick Facts

- Today marks World Elephant Day, an international project that raises awareness of the urgent plight of Asian and African elephants.
- Thomas Reid '10, a zookeeper at Memphis Zoo, cares for the zoo's three African elephants.



*Reid and Tyranza, an African elephant*

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE – “An elephant never forgets,” the saying goes. There’s little chance that Winthrop alumnus Thomas Reid ’10 could forget that Aug. 12 is **World Elephant Day** ... and if he did, he has three immense pachyderms to remind him.

Reid, a zookeeper at **Memphis Zoo**, will spend World Elephant Day – dedicated to raising awareness about the urgent plight of Asian and African elephants – as he spends most days: feeding and caring for Tyranza (“Ty”), Gina and Asali, the zoo’s female African elephants. It’s a job, Reid noted, where “no day is the same as the one before it or after it.”



*Reid giving Gina her daily bath*

The Anderson, South Carolina, native works on a rotation schedule with the zoo’s gentle giants. The schedule allows him to build a relationship with each elephant that works for her unique characteristics.

“Elephants are very smart, and they keep you thinking quickly on your feet,” said Reid. “All three elephants have different personalities – that plays a part in how I interact with them and train them.”

He tempers his affection for his wards with respect, never forgetting that Ty, Gina and Asali are exceptionally powerful animals that are “trained, not tame.” He added that the elephants “can be gentle

giants, but at the same time they have more than 150,000 muscles in their trunks.”

Reid’s work experience with elephants extends beyond Memphis Zoo. He earned a B.S. in biology (minor in anthropology) at Winthrop. Reid also completed internships at **Audubon Zoo** in New Orleans, Louisiana, and the **Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Center for Elephant Conservation** in Polk County, Florida. His work at the center led to a traveling position with the circus that took him across the U.S. and Mexico.

Spending so much time with elephants, Reid said, has taught him some important lessons about relationships – and life – in general.

“With elephants, you have to build a relationship that is based on trust and respect,” explained Reid. “You get out of it what you put into it.”

Visit the **World Elephant Day website** for more information about this international project to conserve and protect elephants from the threats they face.

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