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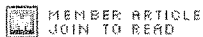
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## Under the big top: Asian elephant conservation

Animal activists say it's just an act

By Joe Eaton | Dec 15, 2003

As baby elephants go, Riccardo, a 232-pound male Asian elephant born into the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus in early December, is smaller than most.

But as the first second-generation Asian elephant born in captivity in the circus's breeding program, his birth is a weighty occasion.

"I feel as proud and happy about this as I would about having my own child," says Kenneth Feld, Ringling Bros.' chief executive.

Riccardo was born at Ringling's Center for Elephant Conservation, a private 200-acre breeding and elephant retirement facility near Tampa. The program has had 16 elephant births, including Riccardo's parents, since 1992. It expects four more arrivals in the next 18 months.

Ringling has 64 Asian elephants, a third of which perform in the circus. The success of the breeding program is a success for the endangered Asian elephant, Feld says.

Experts estimate there are between 30,000 and 40,000 Asian elephants living in the wild worldwide. Poachers hunt males for their ivory tusks. Human encroachment on the tropical forests in which they roam also threatens their numbers.

Feld says his company has both the funds and the will to ...

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