India's 'granny' elephant dies aged 88

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Awarded the title of "Gaja Muthassi" (elephant granny), Dakshayani took part in temple rituals and processions for decades

An Asian elephant believed to be the oldest ever in captivity has died aged 88 in the southern Indian state of Kerala, officials said Thursday.

Awarded the title of "Gaja Muthassi" (elephant granny), Dakshayani

took part in temple rituals and processions for decades, but breathed her last on Tuesday after becoming reluctant to eat, her veterinary surgeon said.

"At 3 pm, a sudden shiver passed through her large frame beginning from the head region. After a few minutes she bent her forelimbs and lay down. And that was it," T. Rajeev told AFP.

The Travancore Devaswom Board, which owned Dakshayani, gave her age as 88.

The oldest elephant in captivity recognised by Guinness World Records was aged 86—Lin Wang, another Asian elephant which died in 2003 in a Taiwan zoo. Captive elephants have a life expectancy of 40-plus years.

Pineapples and carrots had been introduced to Dakshayani's diet in recent years to improve her metabolism after she began to have difficulty moving around, probably due to reduced eyesight.

"For the past three years she did not take part in any temple programme or public function," Rajeev said.

"And a couple of months back, we had even moved her to a better tethering place at an elephant farm in Thiruvananthapuram."

India has 2,454 elephants in captivity, a survey released last month said

Wildlife conservationists such as P.S. Easa have criticised the practice of

keeping elephants in captivity, regardless of their conditions.

He said Thursday all such animals should be released to their [natural habitat](link), adding that bestowing titles on elephants did nothing for their well-being.

"All they want, or for that matter, any animal would want, is to be in their natural habitat and have enough space to move around and sufficient food to eat," he said.

Wildlife experts say some 15,000 Asian elephants—or nearly one in three—live in captivity globally, often in dire conditions.

India has 2,454 [elephants](link) in captivity, a survey released last month said.

Former Travancore Board president Prayar Goplakrishnan, under whose tenure Dakshayani was awarded the "Gaja Muthassi" honour, defended the decision to keep her in captivity.

"Due to various practical constraints, we could not let her loose, but instead ensured that she had more than enough space to move around," he told AFP.

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