

Press Release – ‘Jumbo’ jets from Gloucestershire Airport



Staff at Gloucestershire Airport were on standby today to whisk an urgent and unusual consignment onto a waiting turboprop. Just minutes after the precious cargo arrived by road, it was airborne and on its way to France with a team of supporting personnel.

This time critical treatment is normally reserved for VIP's and organ transplants, but this flight was rather different. A team from the International Zoo and Wildlife Institute in Berlin, as part of their internationally acclaimed research work on assisted reproductive techniques in elephants, were transporting elephant semen from West Midlands Safari Park, near Bewdley to Beauval Zoo, near Tours.

16-year-old African bull elephant, Jack, had provided the sample and it is hoped that the recipient, 20-year old N'Dala, will conceive. It will be 8-12 weeks before vets will know whether the insemination attempt has been successful and, if so, a further 22 months before her calf is born.

West Midlands Safari Park Director of Wildlife, Bob Lawrence said; "These are groundbreaking techniques and flying the veterinary team by private plane from Gloucestershire Airport to Tours was the best way to achieve the task. The material however cannot, for obvious reasons, be allowed to pass through an X Ray machine and we arranged with the Airport staff to clear this in advance because it is essential that we weren't delayed."

Gloucestershire Airport's Head of Operations, Darren Lewington added; "This was an unusual request, but we were able to make the necessary security arrangements and expedite the team's passage through the Airport. We can handle these type of flights far more efficiently than the major international airports; hopefully, the mission will be a success. We only played a small part in this, I'm sure the mechanics of the insemination process are far more difficult!"

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