

A Review of Guzoo Animal Farm



**Based on the
Alberta Zoo Standards**

Introduction

Zoocheck Canada is a national animal welfare charity established in 1984 to promote the interests of wildlife in captivity and in the wild. For the past twenty years, Zoocheck has carried out assessments of captive wildlife husbandry and housing conditions in a wide range of facilities; evaluated and addressed public safety and security issues related to wildlife in captivity; and evaluated the effectiveness of live animal-based education and conservation programming.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is an animal welfare charity that works internationally and locally to end cruelty to animals through field work, campaigning, and education. WSPA is the world's largest federation of humane societies and animal protection organizations, representing over 802 member societies in more than 147 countries.

Zoocheck and WSPA have been monitoring the conditions in zoos across Canada for many years. Guzoo Animal Farm (Guzoo) near Three Hills, Alberta has been a concern to both organizations for several years due to its substandard animal husbandry conditions and safety practices. Zoocheck and WSPA have documented many of these concerns in a variety of reports and papers. In response to those concerns, both groups worked diligently to assist the province to develop standards to deal with the problems at Guzoo and other substandard facilities in the province.

In 2005, the Alberta government finalized standards for zoos in Alberta with a stated purpose “to ensure that facilities requiring an Alberta Zoo Permit meet acceptable standards that provide: a suitable environment for the animal collections and visitors; an environment that emphasizes education; where off-site display occur, there is minimum risk to surrounding free-ranging wildlife, domestic animals and people, and in some cases provide an opportunity for scientific research and animal propagation to support wildlife conservation programs.”

The Alberta Government announced the new zoo standards in October 2005. The standards came into effect on April 1st 2006 and zoos were given until October 2006 to comply. Now, more than one year after the standards were introduced, Zoocheck and WSPA have conducted an inspection of Guzoo to assess their compliance with these new regulatory requirements. This report is a summary of violations that we observed during a visit to Guzoo Animal Farm on July 11, 2007. Photographs have been included showing many of the violations.

Zoocheck and WSPA have produced this report to highlight the ongoing and unresolved problems at Guzoo Animal Farm. The Government of Alberta should, in the interests of both animal welfare and public safety, move to enforce the Alberta zoo standards to the full extent of the law. If Guzoo is unable to come into compliance with provincial law after all this time, it may be time to revoke the zoo license and relocate the animals.

Animal Care and Confinement

The stated purpose of the animal exhibit standards is “to ensure the exhibits meet the needs of the animals that will occupy them” and yet the animals at Guzoo continue to live in impoverished enclosures with lack of fresh and appropriate food and water.

Food & Water: Section III. E. General Animal Care Standards states that “Animals must be provided with nutritious food as set out in the veterinary written agreement and a potable water source must be available to all animals at all times” and “Feeding and watering containers must be kept clean and self-feeders and watering devices must be checked daily.”

Since the Alberta government chose not to provide us with a copy of Guzoo’s development plan, which would include the veterinary written agreement, which outlines the recommended diet for the animals, compliance with the diet section of the standards cannot be determined. However, “rotting” carcasses were observed in both the lion and tiger enclosures.

Unclean water was observed in a number of the animal enclosures including the capybara, Siberian lynx, tiger, lion, goat and pig enclosures.



Filthy water in lynx enclosure



Water in capybara enclosure



Green water in lion enclosure



Rancid water in tiger pool

Cleanliness of cages: Section III. E. General Animal Care Standards states that “Buildings and substrates to which animals have access must be kept clean as follows:

- Washable surfaces must be washed clean and disinfected regularly to prevent potentially dangerous accumulations of organic and inorganic materials and organisms.
- Substrates which cannot be washed must be cleaned of gross waste (e.g., perishable food and animal waste) on a daily basis (enclosures smaller than 0.5 acres) and less frequently for larger enclosures. The animal care protocol may indicate longer cleaning intervals for some species to reduce psychological stress. To facilitate cleaning all areas of the enclosures must be accessible to keepers.
- Substrates such as loose bedding material must be changed if soiled with feces and urine and any bedding provided must be kept dry and changed on a regular basis.”

A build up of animal waste in the budgie, rabbit and pigeon cages, as well as a large pile of feces in the Barbados sheep enclosure, were observed.



Build up of feces in the bottom of the budgie cage

In addition, a number of cleanable surfaces did not appear to have been cleaned in a week or more.

Overcrowding and enclosure size: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Exhibit enclosures must be of a sufficient size to provide for the physical well being of the animal. All animal exhibits must be of a size and complexity sufficient to provide for the animal’s physical and social needs and species typical behaviours and movements.” And that “Enclosures must be of a sufficient size and design to allow individual animals the opportunity to avoid or withdraw from contact with other animals in the enclosure or remove themselves from the view of visitors using topography (e.g. large earth mounds, large rocks), fixed features (e.g. fences, walls screening, shelter boxes), moveable fixtures (e.g. brush piles, root balls) or other design methods.”

A number of Guzoo’s enclosures are poorly designed, undersized and do not allow the animals to express a full range of their natural movements and behaviours. For example:

- tiger enclosure is too small for adequate exercise and is not provided with proper furnishings or pool large enough to swim in;

- primate enclosures do not allow for natural locomotory behaviours;
- foxes confined in a small cage (approx. 5' x 5') do not have sufficient space for exercise;
- a coatimundi does not have adequate space to move run or climb normally;
- several birds, including budgies and a great horned owl, are not provided with enough space to achieve flight;
- lion enclosures are too small and prevent animals from achieving adequate exercise;
- New Guinea singing dogs without adequate space to run or walk more than a short distance;
- an unidentified lizard is housed in a terrarium that does not allow for normal movements and behaviours.



This barbary ape, Spud, has been housed alone in this grossly undersized enclosure since 1999

In addition, there are a number of overcrowded enclosures, such as those housing guinea pigs, budgies, rabbits, pigeons, goats and pigs.

This cage, because it is vertically structured, hampers the bird's ability to fly. As well, the cage contains too many birds. Since this exhibit is a zoo display, unlike pet birds that are kept in similar cage types, these birds will probably never be allowed out for free flight, so the conditions are not acceptable.

This is an example of an exhibit that fails to address the full range of physical and behavioural needs.





The fox in this enclosure has only a sleeping box for privacy

A number of enclosures fail to provide appropriate privacy opportunities for the animals. In the petting zoo, budgies, rabbits, goats and guinea pigs, including females with young, are in many cases overcrowded and do not have any opportunity to remove themselves from public view. For many other animals, including primates, coatimundi, tigers, lions, wolves and foxes, the only way to obtain privacy is to enter their sleeping boxes or off exhibit, “winter” holding area. There are no other adequate privacy options for these animals.

These enclosures should all provide areas in the on-exhibit space in which animals can remove themselves from public view. They should not have to enter a sleeping box or other confined space, especially in the heat of summer, to obtain privacy.

Social grouping of animals: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “All animals must be maintained in numbers sufficient to meet their social and behavioural needs”.

Guzoo houses a number of animals in inappropriate social environments, including a cockatoo, coatimundi (named Squeeker), wolf-dog hybrid, coyote and several primates, all of them social species who should have contact with conspecifics.

All primates are social animals. This is one of a number of monkeys, held in isolation at Guzoo. This individual should be living in a group of 4 – 6 individuals.



Guzoo owner, Lynn Gustafson indicated that he removes young animals, including lion cubs, from their mothers at a very young age for hand-rearing. This practice could have long term consequences to the animals as it isolates them during a critical stage of social development and deprives the animals the appropriate social group.

Breeding: Section II. A. Animal Collection Management Standards states that “Breeding of animals in the zoo facility may take place if it is approved as part of the Zoo Development Plan. If not approved, breeding must be prevented through drug therapy, appropriate management (i.e. opposite sexes kept in separate enclosures) or sterilization.”

Information provided by the Alberta government through a Freedom of Information request did not include any documentation regarding which species of animals the owner is permitted to breed, so we were unable to determine compliance with this section of the standards. However, young snow monkeys and an infant lion was observed at the zoo (apparently removed from the mother to be hand-reared). Guzoo’s owner has acknowledged selling big cats into the exotic pet

trade in the past. Since big cats, such as lions and tigers, are already in a surplus situation in Canadian zoos and the pet trade, breeding should not be allowed.

Shelter from the elements: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Animals must be protected from injurious heat and cold associated with ambient outdoor conditions or any other weather conditions that are detrimental to their health.”

A number of Guzoo’s enclosures do not have adequate shelter to protect all animals, at the same time if necessary, from heat, cold, sun, rain, wind and snow. These include fainting goats, waterfowl, capybara, Siberian lynx, tiger, New Guinea singing dog, coyote, timber wolf, black bear, sika deer, fallow deer, elk, musk ox, bison, yak, dromedary camel and Himalayan tahr.



In captivity, all animals, including cold weather, open terrain and mountain species, should be provided with shelter and shade opportunities.

Drainage: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Since water is a significant element in the life cycle of many diseases and parasites, enclosures must be landscaped in a fashion that prevents accumulation of standing water within the enclosures.”

Drainage problems were evident in the capybara and goose enclosures. Many of the enclosures are not landscaped to facilitate the runoff of excess surface water. While conditions were dry during the inspection, since no significant landscape modifications were noted, it can be assumed that the problem of excess standing water and the resulting mud observed during previous visits remain unresolved. However, to properly assess enclosure drainage, an inspection, in the spring when winter snow is melting or after a significant rainfall, is required. On June 5 2005, Dr. Ken Gold visited Guzoo and found the floors of many of the exhibits partially flooded. His comments and photos can be found in WSPA’s Report, *Failing the Grade: Alberta Zoos Five Years On*. In addition, in the past, excess surface water from some enclosures has drained out across the public walkways, creating the potential for parasite and disease transmission to visitors, something of particular concern since cages do not appear to be subject to rigorous cleaning, particularly in the winter.

Enrichment for animals: Section III. D. Animal Behaviour Husbandry Standards states that “The purpose of these standards is to facilitate development of animal enrichment that improves the psychological well being of the animals. Enrichment consists of a range of measures, including fixed exhibit features, non-fixed features and novel objects that attempt to provide a more stimulating environment for the animals.” And that “there must be a written document outlining an enrichment program for each species, species group or species assemblage (if appropriate) at the exhibit level that may include fixed features, non-fixed features and how food is made available.”

The Alberta government chose not to provide a copy of Guzoo’s enrichment plan through the Freedom of Information process, so compliance with the plan cannot be determined.

Lack of enrichment for animals at Guzoo continues to be a significant problem. The following enclosures did not have adequate enrichment, including furnishings, to keep the animals physically and psychologically engaged and active: primates, foxes, coatimundi, skunk, raccoon, coyote, New Guinea singing dog, wolf-dog hybrid, wolf, bear, deer, elk, coyote, Barbados sheep, elk, yak, Himalayan tahr, tiger, lion, Great horned owl and the animals in the petting areas of the zoo.

Poorly equipped, relatively barren enclosures do not encourage species typical movements and behaviours. Many animals are lethargic because they have nothing to do.

This bear enclosure is flat and featureless



This snow monkey enclosure lacks equipment to encourage natural behaviour



This raccoon enclosure is flat, barren & hard



New Guinea singing dog enclosure lacks any enrichment



Safety risks to animals: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “All equipment, fixtures and vegetation must be installed in such a way that they do not present a hazard to the

animals and must be maintained in good working condition.” And “Fencing must be of a design and strength suitable for the particular species and must be attached to posts firmly fixed into the ground in a manner that prevents animals from detaching the material or dislodging the posts.”

At Guzoo, some enclosures still remain in a state of disrepair posing a physical risk to the animals living in them. These include:

- hotwire in bear enclosure was hanging and appeared to no longer be functional;
- brahman bull fencing insecure allowing the bull to put his head underneath to feed in the emu enclosure;
- rusty old farm equipment in sika & fallow deer enclosure;
- broken gate to elk enclosure;
- lack of double fencing between hoofstock enclosures to protect them from each other;
- plastic in lynx enclosure;
- broken fencing around Barbados sheep enclosure.



Damaged gate on elk enclosure



Bull with head under fencing



Damaged fencing around Barbados sheep enclosure



In addition, children in the petting area are unsupervised putting both the young animals and children at risk of injury and disease transmission.

Public feeding: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Feeding of animals by visitors must not be allowed except in specific circumstances where food prepared by the zoo is provided to the public and amounts are carefully controlled.

There continues to be evidence that the public are encouraged to feed the animals and that staff are often not present to supervise visitors and ensure that the amount of food is being controlled.

Containment

The stated purpose for containment standards is “to prevent direct contact between zoo animals and free-ranging wildlife, domestic animals, and visitors to the zoo facility; to prevent escape from the zoo facility; to prevent the transmission of disease and/or parasites, and; to prevent interbreeding (genetic contamination) between zoo animals and free-ranging wildlife.”

Perimeter fence: Section II. D., Wildlife and Controlled Animal Containment Standards states that “A perimeter fence (equivalent to chain link fence) a minimum of 2.5 meters high all around all the animal enclosures will be required, unless the species held in the zoo facility already have a fully contained perimeter (e.g. amphibians and reptiles in cages within a building) or have an alternate system as identified and approved in the Zoo Development Plan.”

The Guzoo facility is not surrounded by a perimeter fence sufficient to discourage escaped animals from leaving the zoo grounds. As stated previously, the Alberta government chose not to release the majority of Guzoo’s development plan through the Freedom of Information process, so we are unaware of any specialized agreement regarding an alternate perimeter containment system.

Gates in perimeter fence: Section II. D., Wildlife and Controlled Animal Containment Standards states that “Individual animal enclosures and the perimeter fencing must be locked when the zoo facility is closed and staff are not present. When the zoo facility is open to the public, the perimeter fence may be unlocked; however, individual animal enclosures must remain locked except when staff are present and working with or displaying the animals.”

While the regulations allow for the gates to be unlocked during the hours when the zoo facility is open, they do not permit gates to be left wide open. Professionally operated zoos ensure that their public entry gates are set up so that if an animal escapes while on the zoo property they still act as a secondary barrier to contain the animal.

The gates that form a part of the perimeter fence at Guzoo remain open during visitor hours allowing patrons to come and go freely throughout the day. If an animal were to escape, as has

happened in the past, there does not appear to be any immediate way for the zoo staff to close the gates and focus on recapturing the animal.



Front gate open



Gate in the perimeter fence leading up the hill

In addition, the hoofstock enclosure fence-line to the northeast and southwest of the facility make up a portion of the perimeter fence, meaning that there is actually no perimeter fence in these areas of the zoo, only a primary barrier for the animals housed in these enclosures.



Hoofstock enclosure fence-line / perimeter fence on the northeast side of Guzoo.



Hoofstock enclosure fence-line / perimeter fence on the southwest side of Guzoo.

In addition, on the day of our inspection, we found the coyote enclosure unlocked and no staff anywhere to be seen, despite waiting more than 15 minutes in the area for staff to arrive.



Fencing for animals that dig: Section II. D. Wildlife and Controlled Animal Containment Standards states that “Animals that can dig must have adequate flooring or material buried under the ground at the enclosure perimeter to prevent them from digging out of their enclosure or shelter.

A number of enclosures housing species, including Siberian lynx, cougar, timber wolf and black bear, that could potentially escape by digging their way out of their cages do not appear to be equipped with buried fencing or a chainlink skirt protruding at ground level into the cage to prevent that from happening.

Fence strength: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Fencing must be of a design and strength suitable for the particular species and must be attached to posts firmly fixed into the ground in a manner that prevents animals from detaching the material or dislodging the posts.

A number of animal enclosure barriers were damaged or appeared to be constructed of materials lacking the strength and/or design to properly contain the animals they constrained should those animals be sufficiently motivated to escape. These include the black bear, tiger, lion, bison, elk, yak, tahr and Brahma bull.



This deer fencing is not strong enough to safely contain bison



Deer fencing (with or without hotwire) is not adequate to contain bears

“Deer fencing” is being used to contain yak and tahr, a material of dubious strength for these animals.

Enclosures for animals that climb or jump: Section III. B. 1. General Exhibit Standards states that “Dangerous animals that can climb or jump must be kept in completely fenced or walled enclosures with roofs, or in enclosures with fences or walls of the type and construction which

prevents animals from jumping over or climbing up and over the top of the fences or walls, or enclosures surrounded by suitable dry moats or wet moats of adequate depth having sufficiently high outer-edge walls or fences above the water surfaces. These moats must be surrounded by fences, walls, hedges or other shrubbery sufficient to prevent visitor approaching too close to the edges of the moats.”

The tiger and lion enclosures at Guzoo are surrounded by No. I & II gauge chain link which is not adequate to contain these powerful animals. In addition there is no roof on this tiger enclosure and the small deterrent along the top of the fence that angles into the enclosure is not adequate to prevent the tiger from climbing onto the shelter and jumping up and out of the enclosure.



The tiger housed in this enclosure could easily jump out

Public and Staff Safety

Standoff barriers: Section II. H., Public and Staff Safety Standards, states that “Effective guardrails or barriers must be constructed to prevent contact between the visiting public and any animals posing a safety hazard.”

There are a number of enclosures at Guzoo that do not have adequate barriers to keep the public back from the animal enclosures. Some cages have warning signs, however, this is not adequate given that young children may be unable to read them and the animals housed inside the enclosure can pose a serious risk to the public. The enclosures without adequate standoff barriers include the barnacle goose, capybara brahman bull, elk, bison, yak and Himalayan tahr.

Double door entry: Section II. H., Public and Staff Safety Standards, states that “Animals must be safely confined. Enclosures with potentially dangerous animals must have double door entry systems or a separate, secure shift area where the animals can be secured during routine maintenance, cleaning or veterinary care.”

A number of enclosures that contain dangerous animals do not have double door entry or shift cages to allow safe cleaning of cages and feeding, etc. These include the cougar, Siberian lynx, timber wolf, black bear, coyote, tiger, lion and New Guinea singing dog enclosures.

Education

Signage: Section II. G., Conservation Education Standards, states that “The purpose of these standards is to promote positive attitudes about wildlife by providing information and knowledge to the public. The standards for education programs for wildlife and controlled animals in a zoo facility are:

- The zoo must have an active educational program as outlined in the Zoo Development Plan and all exhibits must have signs that identify the species and provide information about the status and range in the wild. Educational programs may also include species not present at the zoo facility (e.g. SRD has information covering species at risk). See Appendix C for further information.” Appendix C contains suggestions for the type of information that could be included in education programs.”

At Guzoo, there was no signage evident at the wolf and wolf-dog hybrid enclosures. Some signs were clearly meant to be humorous, rather than educational, which in some cases is contrary to the idea of promoting positive attitudes about wildlife. In addition, many of the signs focus on taxonomy only and fail to include information about the conservation status, biology, behaviour and other information about the species.

Since the Alberta government chose not to provide Guzoo’s educational program outline from their Zoo Development Plan through the Freedom of Information process, we are unable to determine compliance.

Staff training: Section II. I., Staff Experience and Training Standards, states that “The purpose of these standards is to ensure that the keepers at the zoo, whether the owner, the operator or the staff (including volunteers), have the necessary experience and training to ensure the zoo facility is operated according to the standards in this document and good zoo practice.”

The expectations of zoo staff are presumably outlined in Guzoo’s Zoo Development Plan, but Zoocheck and WSPA were denied access to them through the Freedom of Information process. Therefore we are unable to determine if Guzoo is in compliance with these standards. Having said that, in the past, Guzoo owner Lynn Gustafson has indicated that he and his staff have only farming experience and whatever experience they have gained while working at Guzoo. He has admitted that they have not had any professional training in the care and husbandry of wild animals.

Record Keeping, Transportation and Animal Health: There are specific standards outlined in the Government of Alberta Standards for Zoos in Alberta in each of these areas, but because the Alberta government chose not to release that information through the Freedom of Information process, compliance cannot be determined.

Additional concerns regarding spread of disease

The hand-washing station in petting area has anti-bacterial gel rather than soap and water. Antibacterial gel has been found to be ineffective in adequately addressing the spread of zoonotic diseases.

In addition despite past and present permit conditions indicating that dogs are not to be permitted to be running throughout the zoo, domesticated dogs are still allowed to run freely.



Conclusion and Request for Enforcement of Provincial Legislation

While Guzoo appears to have made some minor improvements since the introduction of the Government of Alberta Standards for Zoos, many of them appear to be relatively minor and/or do not address the substantive concerns about animal welfare and public safety that have been highlighted in the past. There are still significant violations of the standards and concerns about poor animal welfare and zoo visitors being put at risk of injury or disease remain.

During this review of Guzoo Animal Farm, more than 100 individual violations of the standards and one violation of the permit conditions were observed. Therefore, Zoocheck and WSPA request that the Government of Alberta take immediate action to enforce its zoo standards, bringing Guzoo into compliance. Failing that, Guzoo's license should be revoked.