

Ontario Zoo Review Series - #1

Greenview Aviaries, Park & Zoo



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ZOOCHECK CANADA INC.

Zoocheck Canada is a national animal protection charity (#13150 2072 RR 0001) established in 1984 to promote and protect the interests and wellbeing of wild animals.

Policy

Zoocheck objects in principle to the keeping, confinement, use, exhibition and performance of wild animals in captivity as captivity is not in the best interests of those animals¹. Nor does the exhibition of live wildlife provide a positive educational experience for the general public. Wild animals removed from their natural environment and ecological context bear little or no meaningful resemblance to their counterparts in the wild.

Nonetheless, animals are kept in zoos and similar captive situations at present and for these animals, improvements in the conditions to which they are subjected are urgently needed. Zoocheck believes the onus must be on the owners/operators of facilities who choose to keep these animals captive, to provide for them the best possible care in the circumstances.

The Investigation

This report provides an overview of the Greenview Aviaries Park and Zoo in Morpeth , Ontario on July 16, 2008. It is the first in a series of investigative reports aimed at providing a snapshot image of the current status of captive wild animals in Ontario.

Investigator Profile

In 1978 Else Poulsen received her BSc. in Biology from Brock University and in 1995 her 4 year Diploma in Zookeeping from the City of Calgary Apprenticeship Programs. She has dealt with variety of animal species, in her work as a field biologist in Alberta's energy industry, as a zookeeper at the Calgary Zoo, and as a bear specialist in several other facilities.

She has provided expert assistance and advice about modernizing bear husbandry methods, environmental enrichment programming and enclosure design issues to zoos, sanctuaries and animal welfare groups around the world.

Poulsen has more than 40 papers and articles to her name in scientific research and technical journals, textbooks and other publications. She consults as an animal behavior and captive environment trouble-shooter. She has also lectured on modern bear care and animal welfare issues to audiences as diverse as university students studying population genetics to First Nations Band Council members in northern Canada.

¹ In limited circumstances, exclusively for the purpose of benefiting the individual animal or species, Zoocheck Canada supports the keeping of wild animals in captivity as part of a legitimate rehabilitation and release program, or for non-releasable animals that have been retired or rescued, or that are part of a legitimate captive propagation initiative, provided the animal's physical, psychological and social needs are addressed as the primary concern.

THE SITUATION IN ONTARIO

There are currently few rules governing the operation of zoos and other kinds of captive wildlife displays in Ontario. This lack of regulation has resulted in a proliferation of zoos and zoo-type exhibits in the province. Ontario has more of these facilities than any other province, including many of the worst in Canada

Unlike many other jurisdictions, in Ontario, non-indigenous exotic wildlife species are not regulated. Virtually anyone can acquire exotic wild animals, house them in conditions of their choosing and then open up for public viewing. There are no laws or regulations requiring the owners or operators of zoos to have expertise or experience in wild animal care, the financial resources to properly operate their facility or an ability to conduct their business in a humane and safe manner.

"Specially protected and game wildlife," defined as native wildlife listed in the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, can only be kept and displayed if a license to do so has been obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). Three general animal welfare conditions are attached to all licenses, but they are not specific and are open to interpretation, so enforcement is problematic.

Ontario's lack of zoo licensing and comprehensive wildlife in captivity standards has resulted in a large number of zoos and wildlife menageries operating at a standard of their own choosing. There is nothing in place that specifically addresses the many issues associated with the capture, breeding, keeping and display of wild animals in zoos and zoo-type exhibits.

The unfettered proliferation of wild animal displays in Ontario has been recognized as a problem for approximately 30 years. Numerous measures to deal with this issue have been initiated, but none have been fully supported by government, so the captive wildlife industry remains essentially unmonitored and uncontrolled to this day.

The Government of Ontario has the ability to create a regulatory regime for all wildlife in captivity that is consistent with other jurisdictions, comprehensive, fair to license holders and respectful of the many individual animals whose lives are directly affected by it. In addition to numerous workable and adaptable models being available in other jurisdictions, in 2001, the MNR published its own set of standards for zoos.

Comprehensive Licensing and Regulation is Required

The Ontario government should implement and administer a comprehensive zoo and wildlife in captivity regulatory program that requires anyone holding native and/or exotic wild animals in captivity to obtain a license and to satisfy a series of conditions as to their knowledge, experience, financial abilities, wild animal housing and management practices, safety procedures and other relevant issues. Licenses should be issued annually and only after an inspection of the premises to be licensed is conducted. The regulatory program should include the ability to conduct special inspections, penalties for non-compliance and provisions for license revocation.

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act

In 2008, the Ontario government introduced *Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. During the buildup to the introduction of the Act, government officials and elected representatives said the Act would deal with a variety of animal welfare issues, including roadside zoos.

Bill 50 would:

- Make it a provincial offence to abuse any animal. Ontario is the only province where it is not an offence to abuse most animals. It is only an offence to abuse cats and dogs in commercial breeding operations.
- Establish penalties including a lifetime ban on owning animals.

- Allow the Ontario SPCA to inspect roadside zoos and other facilities that keep animals. Currently, anyone can refuse to show the Ontario SPCA their animals.
- Establish animal care standards and make failing to comply with these an offence.

While Bill 50 contains a number of very positive features and will significantly improve the existing Ontario SPCA Act, it will not address most of the problems that have been identified in zoos and zoo-type exhibits across the province.

Even though the Ontario government has repeatedly indicated its intent to deal with wildlife in captivity issues through Bill 50, there are currently no specific wildlife in captivity standards or regulations being proposed at this time . If standards of some kind are developed in future, they will not contain up front licensing of zoos and zoo-type exhibits that screen persons wanting to own wild animals or open public displays. Standards promulgated under Bill 50 will be enforced retroactively after animals have been acquired or a zoo or wildlife display opened.

If, as the Government of Ontario has stated, Ontario is to move from "worst to first" in animal protection, then Bill 50 must include comprehensive regulations for zoos. With the weakest zoo regulations in the country, Ontario is the only province that does not require zoos and zoo-type facilities to meet specific public safety requirements and does not require residents to obtain a license to keep exotic wild animals.

The lack of appropriate laws and regulations, and the difficulties inherent in enforcing the existing relatively minor welfare provisions attached to licenses issued under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*, mean that Ontario's zoos and wildlife exhibits go more or less unchecked. This has left a need for independent animal welfare agencies, such as Zoocheck Canada and the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), to proactively and comprehensively monitor and evaluate these facilities for concerns of human health and safety and animal welfare.

COMMENTARY

GREENVIEW AVIARIES, PARK AND ZOO

Husbandry and Animal Welfare

The purpose of the animals in this collection seems to be to entertain zoo visitors. Judging by the behavior of the animals I observed, I surmise that most of them are fed once a day, either after the zoo is closed to visitors, or, possibly, in the early morning. Since I observed very little food in any of the enclosures, it is likely that feeding occurs after hours.

Hoofstock, small mammals, primates and birds regularly approached the fence line of their enclosures to beg for food from visitors. Small bags and plastic pails containing pellets (type unknown) and crushed corn were available for visitors to purchase and feed to the animals.

Some enclosures were equipped with “gum” dispenser machines containing Cheerios and Fruit Loops-type cereals that visitors could purchase for 25 cents per handful.

A number of enclosures had small feeders built into their fencing where visitors could place purchased food items. As the animals come to feed, they can then be petted.

This kind of feeding method is uncontrolled – meaning it is difficult, if not impossible, for the animal caretakers to know exactly how much food each individual animal is receiving. Dominant animals may be getting the bulk of the food, while less dominant animals may be getting little or none.

This feeding method also facilitates the touching of animals thereby increasing the risk of disease transmission between visitors and animals.

A sign at the miniature horse pen read “Animals May Bite.” Since visitors were encouraged to feed and touch the animals, this sign seemed out of place. Either the animals are safe to feed and contact or they are not.

Despite the fact that it is the facility’s animal management practice to allow and indeed promote public feeding – I did not observe any hand wash stations in the entire zoo, something that is contrary to recommended public health practice in these kinds of situations.

There was no meaningful enrichment, bedding materials or cage furnishings in most of the exhibits. Most were barren and devoid of stimulation. The majority of the enclosures did not provide adequate pools for bathing and some of the waterfowl enclosures had no pools at all.

Some animals, such as cockatoos, were housed in cages that did not provide any opportunity for flight and allowed 360 degree viewing by visitors. This situation was made especially problematic because there was no ability for the birds to obtain privacy. A number of animals in one of the barns were subjected to the overwhelmingly loud noise of a fan directed at providing relief from the heat to visitors.

Several wildlife species native to Ontario are kept at this facility, notably American black bear, raccoon, lynx and bobcat. Therefore, this facility would require a permit from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The conditions experienced by the native wild animals are rudimentary and inadequate, so it is disappointing to know that the OMNR has issued them a permit to keep these animals.

Public Education

The live collection is not organized or displayed according to taxonomy, geographic range, ecological role or in

any other discernable pattern. Instead, the animals are positioned in an ad hoc menagerie-style fashion.

Each cage has been given a number that corresponds to a numbered section on the zoo visitor handout that contains a sentence or two of basic information about each animal. For example, the Blue Tongued Skink is listed as living in cage #13 and is native to Australia. It is identified as “the skink most kept as a pet” and is described as “smooth scaled, tapered tail and short legs” (all of which the visitor can see for themselves without the benefit of the written description). It is further described “Flicks its tongue in and out whenever it is alert or on the move,” although it does not go on to explain why or how the skink senses its environment through its Jacobsen’s organ.

I did not observe any graphics in the zoo that provided substantive biological, natural history or conservation information about the animals.

Human and Animal Safety

1. Domesticated dogs are allowed in the zoo, creating a potentially stressful situation for both the dogs and the zoo animals, as well as increasing the potential for disease transmission.
2. Visitors are allowed to bring food into the zoo to feed to the animals, creating potentially problematic nutrition and disease transmission issues.
3. The reticulated and albino python exhibits were not locked, but were closed by several small slide bolts. As well, the sugar glider cage was not locked.
4. The alligator and caiman exhibits were not equipped with appropriate public stand-off barriers.
5. Zoo visitors are able to contact the snow monkeys, a species that can carry the herpes B virus and transmit it to humans through bites or scratches creating potentially life threatening illness.
6. In places, the zoo’s perimeter fence also serves as part of the animal exhibits (e.g., buffalo pen), instead of being a stand alone, secondary barrier.
7. A child was observed hopping over the stand-off barrier to feed the monkeys situated next to the Japanese macaques. There were no warning signs and no staff supervision in this area.
8. The fencing for the large carnivores (e.g., lion, tigers, bears, wolf) appears to be approximately 3m high, chain link. There is no inwardly angled overhang and the cage is not equipped with a canopy. The fencing is too low for such dangerous animals.

Reptiles and Amphibians

1. The red-eared slider exhibit has a “Do not feed” sign, but visitors can reach in and touch the animals. They have a child’s pool, but very shallow water that allows the turtles to submerge, but not swim properly. One turtle was observed expressing what appeared to be a stereotypic paddling movement.
2. The reticulated and albino python cages are small and do not allow the snakes to stretch out to full body length. The snakes appear overweight and in poor condition. A pool has been provided allowing them to submerge, but there were no fresh, rough wooden surfaces to facilitate skin shedding. They also do not have any ability to remove themselves from public view.
3. The alligator pen has a pebble substrate, no soil, a single heat lamp and a pool that may allow submersion, but not swimming. The environment is simplistic and behaviourally impoverished.

4. The caiman exhibit had no public standoff barrier to discourage visitors from reaching out and touching.
5. The Asian water monitor had a large kitty litter box full of water and some old furnishings that were in need of replacement. The space was undersized measuring approximately 1.5m x 1.8m x 1.8m and therefore did not allow for a full range of normal movements.

Birds

1. Most food and water dishes were positioned on the ground. The majority of the water dishes were filthy and the food dishes were contaminated with feces and other debris.
2. The Black swans were housed in a yard with shelters that did not appear large enough for the adult birds to enter. The water appeared putrid, as did the water in the Mute swan exhibit.
3. The pheasant runs (pens) were small and excessively shaded. Small corn baskets, worn furnishings (in need of replacement) and woodchip and pebble substrates were found in most. The birds appeared hungry and approached, begging for food. In some cases, the males appeared to be housed with females and there were eggs scattered throughout.
4. Umbrella Cockatoo confined in a 0.6m x 0.6m x 1.2m cage and Blue and Gold macaw in a 0.9m x 0.9m x 1.2m cage. The cage substrate required changing as contained a buildup feces. Neither cage was equipped with enrichment furnishings or objects and the birds had nowhere to obtain privacy as visitors could completely surround their cages. As well, these highly gregarious birds were living alone.
5. The Umbrella cockatoo was positioned under a very loud fan that presumably would be a constant stressor to this bird.
6. Finches and Ring Neck Doves in upstairs portion of the barn were overcrowded. There was no natural light in this area, ventilation seemed poor, perches appeared dirty and in need of cleaning and the water dishes, which also served as their bathing area, were contaminated with feces.
7. Sulfur-crested cockatoos and macaws are overcrowded in 1.5m x 1.8m exhibit. No opportunity for flight.
8. Several waterfowl yards have kiddie pools for the birds; the water, which also seems to serve as drinking water, appears fetid and in need of changing.
9. The budgie cage appeared overcrowded. Food and water containers were positioned on the floor. "Budgie racks" are provided but there is no other enrichment.

Hoof Stock

1. Goats have overgrown hooves (slipperfoot) that need trimmed immediately.
2. Syrian donkey (miniature) pen has no enrichment, hay or bedding. Visitors are able to touch the animals, but there are no hand-wash stations available nearby.
3. No public standoff fencing at the alpaca and emu pen. No feeding containers were observed, except for the fence-line feeders for visitors to use.
4. Miniature horses were loitering near the fence-line feeding stations. No food items were observed in the pen. Posted sign warns visitors that "mini horses might bite," yet public feeding is encouraged.

5. No locks were on any of the animal gates in the hoofstock barn.
6. Zebras are kept in relatively barren exhibit. No food was observed and the animals were following visitors along the fence-line begging for food.
7. No public standoff barrier at the bison exhibit. The pen did not contain scratching posts, butting rails, logs or shade structures. The animals appear to be denied access to a small barn that could serve as a shade shelter. A water trough embedded into the ground is provided, but these are very difficult to properly clean.

Primates

1. Several primate cages approximately 1.8m x 1.8m x 1.8m, with old, excessively used furnishings and no other enrichment. Air circulation looked poor and animals appeared very hot.
2. Ring-tailed lemurs in poorly equipped 1.8m x 1.8m x 1.8m cage. Coin operated treat dispenser containing Cheerios and Fruit Loops situated outside of cage. Secondary fencing insufficient to keep public from sticking fingers into cage and 2" x 4" wood with mesh on either side does not prevent public access to cage.
3. Ruffed lemurs provided with tiny water dish and no place to bathe. Their, feed dish was upside down and empty. The animals were lying flat on the ground and motionless to cool themselves in the dirt, since they are so hot.
4. Olive baboons in 3.9m x 7m cage. Coin operated treat dispenser containing Cheerios and Fruit Loops. Sign warns visitors that "animals might bite," but feeding is encouraged.
5. One olive baboon walking in circles; reached outside of cage occasionally for greenery to eat as interior was barren.
6. Olive baboon – top fence line not attached to underground fencing – place where baboon has been digging.
7. Java monkeys, snow monkeys, Ring-tailed lemurs, rhesus macaques in 1.52m x 2.1m x 2.1m cages. Public standoff barrier low and visitors were observed hopping over to feed and touch the animals.

Small Mammals

1. Rabbits, chinchilla, kinkajou cages featured inappropriate wire mesh floor surfaces, old, overused logs and a heavy urine odour. The cages were at roughly adult hip height and contained no other enrichment. Visitors could easily insert their fingers through the wire.
2. Small, relatively barren exhibit positioned below a stairway and visitor viewing platform housed several raccoons.
3. Two adult wallabies in a canopied pen with very little shade. The canopy is hooked on and visitors are able to stick their hands through leaving a hole that could be a vehicle for escape. A strong urine-like odour was noticed.
4. Albino raccoons were housed in 3.04m x 3.04m pen. The raccoons stood up on their hind legs and begged for food. A vertical pole in the center of the cage led up to a platform. No food containers were observed, but a coin operated dispenser containing Fruit Loops and Cheerios was positioned outside of the enclosure.

5. Chinchillas, ground squirrels, sugar gliders and rabbits were housed with near a very noisy fan. The wood furnishings in the cages were in need of replacement. Flies were abundant and seemed particularly problematic around these animals.
6. The coatimundi was kept in 2.43m x 3.04m x 1.52m cage. Visitors could view interior of cage from all side. The floor consisted of pea gravel and the cage was barren, except for a nest box. No food was observed and the water dish was filthy.

Large Carnivores

1. Bobcat and lynx are housed in small, separate 3.65m x 3.04m cages that lacked bedding and enrichment. The visitor standoff barrier was positioned too close to the cage.
2. The wolf paddock fencing was approximately 3.04m tall, too low for adult wolves and a potential safety problem.
3. The lion exhibit fencing was also approximately 3.04m tall, far too low for this species. Given the right motivation, this fence could probably be jumped by the lion. No food was observed, the water bowl was tiny and the lion (the most social of cats) was kept alone.
4. The cougar (Carly) in cage #9 was panting heavily in the heat. The 3.96m x 6.08m x 2.13m pen contained no furnishings or enrichment. There appeared to be no underground fencing and the cage was built like a sand box frame of 2" x 4" planks.
5. Jaguar cage #85 does not appear to be equipped with underground fencing or double door entry. The cage was Spartan and lacked enrichment. Both cats appeared obese and lacking in muscle tone.
6. Bruster and Blueberry, the black bears, are housed in a pen with a 3.04m fence, fortified by "extra" struts, a possible suggestion of previous attempts at escape. The top section of the barrier was equipped with a chicken wire overhang. There was no enrichment in the exhibit and the only shade area for the animals was a den.



Kinkajou, a small, nocturnal South American mammal on inappropriate wire floor surface in barren cage.



Undersized, simplistic small animal cages.



Poorly equipped monkey cage offers little stimulation.



Overly simplistic raccoon exhibit needs additional furnishings.



Barren, thermally simplistic exhibit does not address full range of biological and behavioural needs.



Cockatoos are highly social, very active birds. This cockatoo is kept alone in an undersized cage with no stimulation.



This Ring-tailed lemur exhibit is small and poorly equipped. A coin operated dispenser allows visitors to throw handfuls of Cheerios or Fruit Loops to the monkeys. Public feeding should not be allowed.



Jaguar cage is small and poorly equipped.



Jaguar cage lacks furnishings and environmental enrichment that would keep the animal occupied.



Lion pen fence is very low and not equipped with an inwardly projecting overhang.



Visitors throw hot dogs to wolves. Public feeding of animals should not be allowed.



Visitor feeds potentially dangerous ostrich as there is no public standoff barrier.



All animals should be supplied with clean, fresh drinking water at all times.
The water in this bowl needs changed.



This donkey pen is barren and unstimulating.



Hooves need to be kept worn or trimmed. This goat has severely overgrown hooves.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This series of investigative reports highlight animal welfare and human safety concerns in zoos and wildlife displays across the province.

Key problems identified in Ontario zoos in 2008 include:

1. Poor animal health and welfare;
2. Undersized, badly constructed, poorly designed cages and enclosures;
3. Inappropriate substrates (floor surfaces);
4. Lack of adequate shelter and privacy;
5. Lack of stimulation (e.g., furniture, objects, other enrichment);
6. Lack of nutritive food and potable water;
7. Inadequate safety and security measures.

Many of these problems have been identified in previous reports by various parties in past years.

Recommendation

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act is currently being considered by the Government of Ontario. It contains a number of very positive features and will significantly improve the existing Ontario SPCA Act. However, there are currently no standards or regulations being proposed at this time within Bill 50 or in any other provincial legislation that will properly address issues associated with the keeping of wildlife in captivity. Ontario has the ability to create a regulatory regime within Bill 50 and in other legislation that is both comprehensive and workable but, so far, has chosen not to do so.

In order to properly handle the various animal welfare and human safety concerns inherent in the operation of zoos and wildlife displays, a comprehensive regulatory regime is required. Regulations must require anyone holding native and/or exotic wild animals in captivity to obtain a license and to satisfy a series of conditions as to their knowledge, experience, financial abilities, wild animal housing and management practices, safety procedures and other relevant issues. Annual licenses should only be issued after an inspection of the premises that is to be licensed is conducted. The regulatory program should include the ability to conduct special inspections, penalties for non-compliance and provisions for license revocation.

If, as the Government of Ontario has stated, Ontario's animal protection laws are to be brought from "worst to first," then *Bill 50, An Act to amend the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* must include comprehensive zoo regulations that adequately and proactively address animal welfare and human safety concerns in Ontario zoos and wildlife displays.

