

Ontario Zoo Review Series - #2

The Killman 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 Killman Zoo in Caledonia, Ontario on August 4, 2008. It is the second 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 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 – The Killman Zoo

General

The Killman Zoo was inspected by Else Poulsen in 2006. Some changes have been made since that time, but most of them do not substantially improve animal welfare. They include:

1. The zoo has now changed ownership from the elder Killman to his son Mark Killman and his wife Rhonda. The zoo now advertises itself as one of the largest collection of exotic cats in Ontario.
2. The public pathway has been altered so that it is no longer a loop but instead is a dead-end where the public have to turn around and return in the same direction that they came from. This poses a serious safety concern for the public who could be confused or trapped during an animal escape or fire as they are confined by cages, fencing and forest.
3. I estimate there are at least 90% fewer goats and other hoof stock, domesticated rabbits, pheasants and waterfowl than in 2006. This could be a cost issue as the zoo lost income during the land claim stand off between the governments and Six Nations beginning in 2006 (source: Mark Killman 2006). To generate additional income the family is still breeding and selling Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs, ferrets and doves [photos 2184, 2196], selling cans of peanuts to feed to the animals and they have placed coin operated gumball machines throughout the facility.

Husbandry and Animal Welfare

Although there are now fewer animals in the menagerie there does not seem to have been an improvement in the overall welfare of the animals. Cages are still "homemade," constructed primarily of wooden planks and chain-link fence or wire mesh. They are still generally box-like in shape regardless of the species they contain. The facility is entirely engulfed in forest and, due to the rains this summer, is particularly lush, thick and inviting, yet none of this vegetation is available to the animals – with one exception. The lions and tigers time-share a large poorly fenced-in pond choked with duck weed. It's an all natural exhibit that can only be used part time by several of the animals.

Cages do not seem to have fencing buried into the ground around their perimeters to prevent escapes by digging and the inversely angled tops are of flimsy construction and only supported by 2"x 4" wooden planks.

The facility does have satisfactory public stand-off barriers and signage (located throughout the zoo) displaying a hand missing several digits indicating that visitors could lose a finger if they try to reach into the animal cages.

It seems that the owners are attempting to appeal to family visitors. They have newly painted dens, platforms and other surfaces in bright, child-friendly colors. Painted, oiled and sealed surfaces can be toxic to animals if they gnaw on the wooden surfaces. A male olive baboon was observed to be chewing on a wooden post and swallowing it as there was nothing else to interact with in his cage. The owners are continuing to name young animals after cartoon characters, such as the two lion cubs born in early spring 2008 named Lois Lane [photo 2163] and Lex Luther [photo 2156]. Older animals, such as a male and female lemur, are named Dracula and Buffy the Vampire Slayer [photo 2159]. While these names may be somewhat memorable, they may also present a false image of these animals to zoo visitors.

Most cages are completely barren of species-specific cage furnishings, and offer only wooden resting platforms and, often inappropriately sized, decaying wooden dens. Most of the animals do not have adequate pools for bathing.

For the most part, the animals appeared lethargic, many were obese and lacked good muscle tone. At least six

cats were observed to be actively engaged in stereotypies, pacing for the duration of the inspection. Pacing pathways inside the cages are evidence of problematic pacing issues.

One particularly concerning aspect of the zoo was the treatment of the lion and tiger cubs. At the entrance to the zoo between the outdoor garage sale-like 'gift shop' tables and the ticket shack was a tiny cage (.6m x .6m x .91m) with a tiger cub only months old. This cub who was being hand-raised appeared deeply distressed and was observed clawing and screaming, but no staff responded, although keeper staff, gate staff and the owner was nearby. Two lion cubs (possibly from the same litter), also only months old, were housed in separate enclosures completely devoid of any stimulation. Both male and female were observed pacing.

A male and female cougar were housed together, outside of breeding season, and seemed extremely agitated, making verbal threats and moving cautiously around each other. Staff walked by without stopping or noticing during the cat's lengthy disagreement, which easily could have led to a physical fight.

Gina, a female American black bear that was observed in 2006, still lives alone in a barren enclosure, standing up on command for peanuts. Her enclosure fence is thin gauge wire, low in height and does not seem to be buried into the ground around the perimeter. Suitably motivated, there is little reason to believe Gina could not escape.

Public Safety

Inappropriately thin gauge wire mesh in the large carnivore cages throughout the facility is problematic. None of these cages are entirely safe from animal escape.

Despite the reduction in animal numbers, some can still be touched by visitors, but there do not seem to be any hand-wash stations in the facility.

The wooden bridge constructed for visitors to cross a creek is in disrepair and fencing along the public pathway is often broken, tangled and a potential hazard to young children.

Public Education

Signage providing accurate natural history, biological and conservation information is problematic. A mix of old, often decaying hand-made signs and newly posted information sheets written in small lettering and overwhelmingly lengthy making it unappealing to adults who have children in tow and need to move on. The height and style of these signs are not child friendly and are thus ignored by children.

Summary

Key problems at The Killman Zoo include:

- Undersized, barren cages that provide substandard, sensory deprived environments for the animals they contain.
- Under-stimulated, obese animals.
- Lack of sunshine. The majority of the cages are in a heavily forested area where the tree canopy filters a good portion of direct, natural sunlight. The shady areas seem to harbour large numbers of flies and mosquitoes.
- Unnecessary breeding of native, exotic and domesticated animal species.
- Grossly inappropriate husbandry routines for lion and tiger cubs.

- The goats beg for food and were observed licking the fingers of numerous visitors. There are no hand-wash stations for visitors to use as a safeguard against zoonoses (disease transfer from animals).
- Potentially unsafe conditions for human visitors and animals, including rusty, rotting cage materials and lack of appropriate exit signage.

This facility is deficient in many respects. The zoo's housing and management practices reveal only a rudimentary understanding of the needs and actual welfare status of the animals. The problems are substantial and the quality of life experienced by the animals is questionable, at best. This facility should be closed and the live collection dispersed to more appropriate accommodation elsewhere.

NOTE: On the front page of its website is the following statement, “Killman Zoo is private property. It is not a forum for protest. The proprietors reserve the right to refuse entry to any person and, in particular, to any member or affiliate of WSPA, PETA, Zoo Check and other similar animal rights organizations. Members or affiliates of those organizations found on these premises without express written permission from The Killman Zoo will be charged with trespassing pursuant to the Trespass to Property Act of Ontario.” While it is the right of the zoo owner to post whatever notice he wants, one has to wonder why this zoo is so averse to criticism. The notice must certainly also be a red flag to people who wanted to visit but are sensitive to animal welfare issues and so choose not to.



Animal enclosures must be equipped with furnishings and enrichment that keep the animals occupied. This baboon should not have to seek stimulation by reaching through the barrier.



This lion cub lives on a hard floor surface in a barren cage. Lions are the most social of cats and should be kept in their proper social grouping. Since they already overpopulated in captivity, they should not be bred.



Pacing can be a sign of frustration, deprivation and boredom. This lion cub is held in a barren, hard floored cage with nothing to do.



This tiger cub is distressed by being confined in such a tiny, inappropriate cage away from its mother. Most captive tigers are hybrids and they are already severely overpopulated in captivity.



Cute names don't mask the barren, impoverished living conditions of the animals.



The Killman Zoo uses a “cookie-cutter” approach to animal accommodation. Most animals, regardless of species, live in wooden framed, box-like cages, even if they have very different biological and behavioural needs.



Animals that have nothing to do become obese and spend a great deal of their time sitting, lying or sleeping.



This simplistic environment with its small climbing apparatus will not keep this bear occupied and engaged.



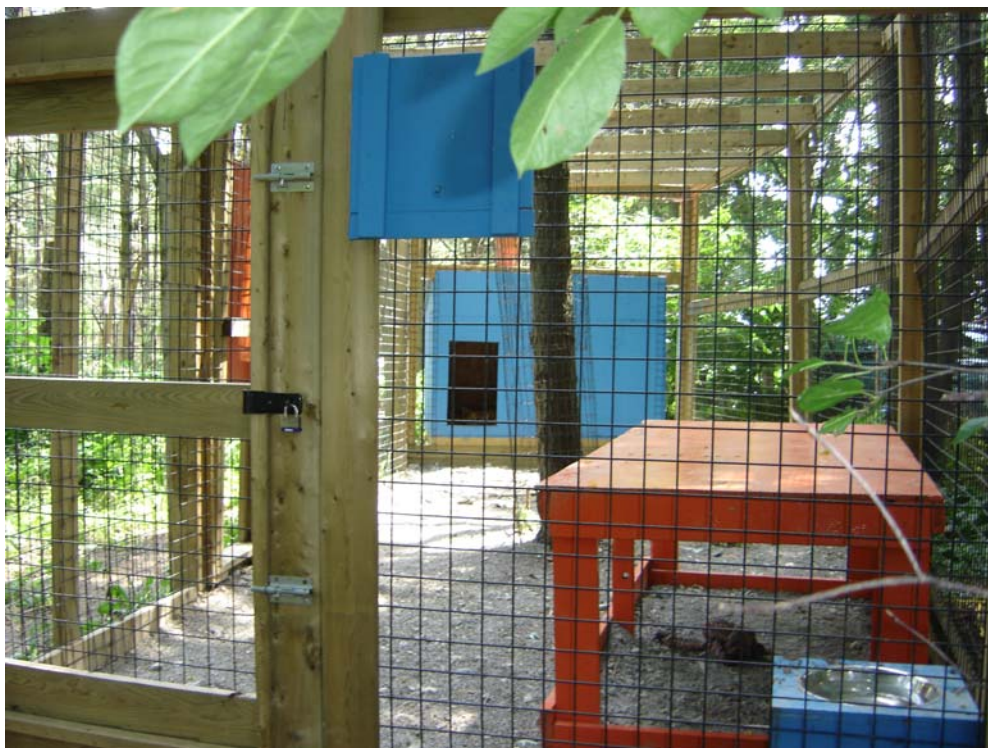
All animals should be provided with multiple privacy areas that allow them to remove themselves from public view or the view of their cagemates.



The hard floor surface, lack of furnishings, absence of privacy and small space make this cage particularly deficient.



This barren cage leaves this cat with nothing to do but sit.



New paint on the den box, platform and waterbowl container do nothing to improve the welfare of the animals.

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.