

Ontario Zoo Review Series - #4

Papanack 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 Papanack Park Zoo in Wendover, Ontario on August 13, 2008. It is the fourth 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 – Papanack Park Zoo

General

The Papanack Park Zoo was evaluated in September 2001 by the World Society for the Protection of Animals. Problems identified at that time included, but were not limited to, enclosure size, a lack of species-specific enclosure design and a lack of meaningful enrichment (e.g., furnishings, objects).

Although problems were still in evidence, the zoo appears to be making some effort to replace old cages with larger, more natural enclosures. As well, they seem to have started an environmental enrichment program and are making an attempt to utilize more vertical space in the cages. A conservation education program for visitors is also more developed.

Several of the newer cages for potentially dangerous species feature high fencing with an inverted overhang at the top, underground skirting to prevent escape by digging and adequate visitor stand-off barriers. A facility perimeter fence was observed, although I was unable to determine if the entire property is enclosed.

While improvements appear to have been made since the WSPA evaluation, a number of enclosures remain undersized, several feature inappropriately thin gauge wire barriers and environmental enrichment is still underdeveloped. As well, the animals appear to be fed in “single pile” feedings once per day in the same location, a feeding method that does little to encourage activity in the animals.

Husbandry and Animal Welfare

One of the more obvious problems at Papanack Park Zoo is the lack of a zoo-wide environmental enrichment program. Upon entering the zoo, I encountered a number of small enclosures housing various monkey species and a coatimundi. These enclosures are moderately well-equipped and provide the animals with things to do. I imagine they give zoo visitors a good first impression. However, that good impression turns to disappointment as the enrichment wanes to nothing by the time the visitor reaches the arctic wolf exhibit finding barren conditions and animals that have little to do except sit or lie around.

In conversations with Papanack Park Zoo staff, I learned that:

1. Most animals are fed in single, piled feedings once per day, either placed in the same location within each enclosure or in the case of large carnivores (where shifting animals may be problematic) by throwing food items (e.g., meat) over the fence. While this feeding method is convenient, it greatly reduces enrichment and activity opportunities for the animals, as well as time spent with keepers which, in some cases, may also serve as enrichment.
2. Except for the tigers (who are apparently hand-raised for shows), the large carnivores (and other animals) are sometimes difficult to shift because the keepers have not trained them to shift for feeding or veterinary purposes. Therefore, when shifting is required for cleaning or repair, food may be partially or wholly withheld for a few days to make the animal hungry enough to move into a holding area. This kind of management regime is “old school.” In many modern zoos it has been replaced with the organized development of the animal-keeper bond and with training animals so they shift willingly and present body parts for veterinary procedures (e.g., blood draws, inspections).
3. One zookeeper informed me that hand-rearing of cats was practiced. They said big cat females are not good mothers, so hand-rearing was necessary. However, hand-raised females often become poor mothers themselves because they have not learned how to appropriately care for young. Removing tiger cubs and other young animals from their mothers and hand-raising them may hinder their social development during a particularly critical period of their lives. It is a questionable practice that may have detrimental, long-term consequences. As

well, trauma and stress may be experienced by the mother when her cubs are removed.

Other problems include:

- Several animals (e.g., eland, snow leopard) were observed pacing in a repetitive fashion and well worn pathways, presumably the result of pacing, were observed in many enclosures (e.g., leopard).
- Visitors can purchase feed for certain animals. Allowing visitors to feed animals can result in dietary imbalance; promote unwanted, abnormal begging behaviours; lead to unsafe human-animal interactions and; increase the potential for zoonotic disease transfer.
- A general lack of nesting/denning material, although there were prodigious amounts of straw covering cage floor surfaces at the time of this inspection, presumably a measure to dry up some rainwater that seemed to saturate some of the enclosures.
- According to one staff member, White-handed gibbons, squirrel monkeys and other animals that are unable to cope with Canada's cold winters are warehoused in an off-site barn for a number of months each year.

Safety and Security

- The inwardly angled upper portion of the white tiger enclosure fence was sagging considerably in places.
- During my visit, a young zookeeper was observed shouting at a "vocalizing" adult white tiger that was in the same building. Shouting at animals and/or loss of composure is often a red flag that a zookeeper is not well trained, confident or feeling safe, especially when working with potentially dangerous animals.
- No double door entry gates (a standard safety measure on animal cages) were observed.
- The gauge of wire in the fencing used to confine some of the hoof-stock (e.g., buffalo) and several large carnivores (e.g., cougar) appeared inappropriately small.
- There are tires tied together with ropes weighting down a tarp covering a large pile of hay in an occupied hoof-stock yard. This is potentially dangerous to the animals as they could get their horns, antlers or legs caught in the ropes.
- A number of the locking mechanisms appeared rusty and old. A stick was holding a gate closed at the snow leopard exhibit.
- A picnic table was located against the visitor stand-off fence behind the tiger enclosure. A visitor could easily hop onto the table to facilitate entry into the restricted area at the rear of the exhibit.
- Animal foods delivered throughout the zoo were sometimes uncovered. I observed food containers left standing, attracting flies and other pests.
- Visitors are encouraged to feed some animals and can buy food to do so. They are instructed how to hold the food to avoid being bitten. Despite the fact that Papanack Park Zoo facilitates interactions between visitors and the animals, I did not observe any hand-wash stations or any information about the importance of washing hands after petting animals as a disease prevention measure.

Public Education

The facility provides ample and consistent signage throughout that interprets key biological and conservation facts about individual species. Visitors can also pick up a pamphlet and a zoo *Map & Guide*. Interpretive programs, such as carnivore feeding sessions, are listed. These feeding programs are delivered by the keepers who answer questions both before and after the feeding. For the most part, the information provided was accurate.

During the Junior Zookeeper Camp I observed a staff member holding an African hedgehog as a contact animal. Children were sitting in a circle and the hedgehog was placed on the ground in the center of the circle. The hedgehog appeared frightened and tried to escape the circle, but his attempts were not successful.

I spoke to four zookeepers during my visit, all of whom had time to stay and chat at length. Since enrichment programming is underdeveloped, in my opinion it would be more productive if two of those keepers spent time delivering enrichment, instead of talking to zoo visitors. This is a small facility, so two staff dealing with visitors should be sufficient.

Summary

The Papanack Park Zoo seems to be going through the same process that many larger municipal zoos have in the past. They appear to be in the middle of a learning curve that is taking them toward better animal welfare.

In building their new enclosures Papanack Park Zoo needs to consider adding smaller outdoor pens (howdy cages) which abut their main enclosures to accommodate low stress animal introductions, training for veterinary reasons and separation when needed. As well, the zoo needs to pay better attention to the spatial needs of animals.

Relatively bland cage interiors are a problem. Introducing a zoo-wide enrichment program would go a long way to alleviating boredom, stress and promoting better animal care at relatively low cost. Bringing enrichment into the zoo involves changing their apparently outdated feeding routines and training staff how to shift animals using positive reinforcement, as well as introducing furnishings, objects, management regime changes and other measures. Visitors enjoy watching animals that are actively engaged in normal behaviours.



Several primate enclosures near the zoo entrance are fairly well equipped furnishings.



These tires and ropes may pose a hazard to the hoofstock.



Public feeding of animals can disrupt animal diets and may pose a hazard to visitors.



Hoofstock paddocks are plain and some are not equipped with visitor stand-off barriers.



Cage furnishings are rudimentary, well worn and in need of replacement.



Hardpan (compacted earth) paths, such as the one in this tiger cage, are usually created by pacing and are often a sign of lack of activity and boredom.



The overhang portion of this tiger enclosure fence is sagging.



The furnishings in this tiger enclosure are basic, should be upgraded.
There are also few shelter and privacy areas.

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.