

# **A Commentary on Guzoo Animal Farm - June 15, 2002 -**

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Zoocheck Canada Inc.

## **Introduction**

Guzoo Animal Farm is a privately owned zoo in Three Hills, Alberta.

While assessing this facility, I considered the “Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare,” a set of criteria used around the world as an aid in assessing the welfare of animals in a variety of circumstances. The Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare are:

1. Freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition.
2. Freedom from discomfort (suitable environment).
3. Freedom from fear and distress.
4. Freedom from pain, injury and disease.
5. Freedom to express normal behaviours in a normal social grouping.

## **Enclosures**

Many of the enclosures are constructed with chainlink fencing and appear sturdy (serval, spider monkey, raccoon, macaque). Other enclosures (musk-ox) were damaged and in need of repair.

The fencing for the American black bear enclosure is approximately 10 feet in height with an overhang of about 3 ft. In my opinion, this is insufficient to contain bears and may be a public safety concern. Black bears are excellent climbers and have been known to climb out of zoo exhibits.

The fox cage was grossly undersized (approx. 4 ft. x 5 ft.) and featured a wire floor surface. Wire flooring is unacceptable because it is uncomfortable to walk on, may cause foot injuries and can be the source of chronic, unmanageable stress. The only solid floor retreat that the fox had available was a small nest box.

Most of the enclosures had grass, earth or mulch substrates. Many of the earth surfaces were compacted, hard and relatively barren. These surfaces should be tilled to make them “softer” and more behaviourally stimulating.

Furnishings were provided in some of the cages, such as log structures in the spider monkey and serval enclosures, but extensive work in this area was needed in most other exhibits. Playground equipment (“monkey bars”) in the bear exhibit appeared out of place and unsafe for the bears. It is also unlikely it would be an effective structure for the bears to utilize because the bars were too small for them to grip properly. Logs or wooden beams at least 4 inches wide would be more effective for bear climbing structures.

All exhibits (except the musk ox) appeared to have some form of shelter, but most were undersized and did not appear sufficient for winter conditions. The musk-ox shelter was

overturned, leaving the animal with no retreat from the elements. The American black bears did not have any visible above ground shelter area, but there may have been an underground den. I did notice a dip in the ground and a slab of concrete that could have been a den area. In any event, there did not appear to be any shady rest areas on the surface for making day beds.

I did not observe any secure secondary containment (shift) areas on any of the enclosures, except possibly the tigers. Unfortunately, it was difficult to determine from the visitor walkway. Shift areas are necessary, so that keepers can safely service cages, to separate animals for feeding and to separate ill or injured animals.

Macaque monkeys are possible carriers of a Herpes B virus which can be fatal to humans. Shifting areas are essential to prevent transmission of this and other diseases.

Stand-off barriers to keep the public a safe distance from the animal cages were not consistent throughout the zoo. Most of the large carnivore cages had barriers but others, such as the lynx and raccoons, did not. While there were warning signs in front of some of the exhibits, these will not stop a child from approaching too closely to a cage. It is the responsibility of the zoo to take whatever measures are necessary for safety, including stand-off barriers that discourage children from climbing over.

### **Animal Care**

The level of animal care at this facility appeared extremely poor. The amount of feces I observed in the cages was excessive. There were also feces in the public areas, an obvious health concern to visitors. Plastic bread bags also littered the cages, which can be a health hazard if ingested, in whole or in part, by the animals.

There were fly-infested carcasses and body parts in many enclosures (wolves, coyotes, raccoons). While carcass feeding is a great way to encourage some natural feeding behaviours, portions need to be controlled so they are consumed in a timely manner. All leftover food needs to be removed daily, so that they don't serve as an attractant to pests. Most enclosures contained leftover, rotting food.

The public feeding of old bread to all animals is a significant concern. Uncontrolled public feeding can cause aggression between conspecifics, malnutrition and obesity. It is also a concern because of the potential of disease transmission (zoonoses) between visitors and animals. I noticed a huge pile of bread in the American black bear enclosure. Bread can be used sparingly as a form of enrichment but should be carefully controlled.

I observed one injured domestic duck with a swollen leg, an obvious limp and significant feather loss. He also appeared very dirty, usually a sign of sickness or injury in birds. The coat of the male tiger was also dull and not groomed.

All visible water appeared dirty.

In the barn were various small cages, one containing a beagle puppy and another containing 15-20 kittens. Outside the barn was a sign inviting you to pick up any animal you wished. This area was unsupervised, so injuries could easily result to any of these infant animals. With the problem of dog and cat over-population, it seems irresponsible for the owner to be allowing these animals to breed, especially in a zoo environment where disease is a concern.

The spider monkey and 2 macaques were all singly housed. The social needs of these animals need to be considered. Primates are highly social and should not be housed alone.

### **Enrichment**

Environmental enrichment consisted of a small toy in the lynx yard and a hanging plastic ball in one raccoon cage. There was no evidence of any formal enrichment program in the rest of the zoo.

### **Behaviour**

Some stereotypic behaviours were observed. One American black bear, both wolves and a silver fox were pacing excessively. All the primates at this facility appeared lethargic. Two raccoons appeared to be begging for food as I walked by. They were reaching their paws through the chainlink fencing.

### **Safety and Security**

Public and staff safety is a concern for the following reasons:

1. There appeared to be no perimeter fence around the facility to discourage escaped animals from leaving the zoo grounds or to prevent feral animals/wildlife from entering.
2. Inconsistent stand-off barriers.
3. Unsupervised grounds and animal contact.
4. No secondary containment on any of the cages.
5. Lack of qualified animal care staff in case of an emergency.

All cages did appear to be locked.

### **Conclusions**

This facility fails to satisfy the “Five Freedoms” of animal welfare. The basic needs of the animals, such as clean water, appropriate diet, sanitary environment and proper shelter were not met in many cases. The conditions at Guzoo Animal Farm were grossly substandard. For this reason, I strongly recommend that Guzoo be closed and the animals dispersed to more appropriate facilities elsewhere.

### **What Hasn't Changed**

A letter to Zoocheck Canada from Alberta Environment Minister Halvar Jonson dated January 23, 2001 indicated the following improvements had been made at Guzoo Animal Farm:

- *Cleaning frequency has been increased*
- *The feeding of bread to any wildlife or controlled animal has stopped*
- *All large ungulates have shelters in their enclosures.*
- *All animals will have appropriate shelters prior to the expiry of the current permit.*
- *Use of some of the smaller cages has been discontinued.*

**At the time of this inspection, none of these improvements appear to have been made.**

The facility was filthy at the time of my visit, bread was in fact being fed to any animal the public desired, the musk-ox did not have a shelter, many of the shelters provided were not appropriate for the winter months and many of the smaller cages were still in use.

## **About the Author**

Jennifer L. Long received a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Windsor in 1991 and a B.Sc. in 1996. She has also completed the Pikes Peak Community College Zookeeping Technology Safety for Zookeepers course in 1998.

Ms. Long began her involvement with zoos as a volunteer guide at the Vancouver Aquarium and then later at the Detroit Zoo. In 1996, she joined the Belle Isle Zoo as a Lead Educator in their Summer Safari Program teaching children about wildlife, with a focus on endangered species and captive breeding as a conservation tool.

Since that time, Ms. Long has worked as a zoo keeper with large carnivores, hippos, bears and primates at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado. In addition to her regular zoo keeping duties, she had responsibility for aspects of the zoo's work in the Species Survival Plan for the highly endangered black-footed ferret and for the training, supervising and evaluating of Zookeeping Technology Program interns.

Ms. Long then moved to Florida's Caribbean Gardens, a 52 acre zoo and botanical garden, accredited by the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums, where she was responsible for a wide range of animal care duties and the training of new staff.

She returned to Canada in 2001 to pursue her work with animals.