



## ZOOCHECK NEWS & VIEWS! FEBRUARY 2024

Our monthly e-newsletter featuring news, events and more.

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### This year's helicopter count shows very low numbers of Alberta wild horses

Zoocheck was pleased to partner with the Help Alberta Wildies Society (HAWS) again this year by sharing in the cost of aerial helicopter counts of wild horses in Alberta. Our independent aerial counts help keep the Alberta government honest and discourage them from inflating horse numbers to make it look like the provincial wild horse population needs to be controlled.

Sadly, for many years the Alberta government has published debatable information and questionable population numbers about wild horses in support of their claim that wild horses are running amok and irreparably harming the Alberta wilds. And even though the horses typically inhabit areas already fractured and damaged by large numbers of cattle, clear-cuts, roads, mining activities, ATV traffic and much more, the government continues to scapegoat the wild horses and says they are hurting the environment. Unfortunately, scapegoating animals for problems caused by humans is something we've seen time and again throughout the years across the country.

In the Sundre Equine Zone, where most of Alberta's wild horses still live, we counted 659 horses in 2022, 684 in 2023 and only 612 in 2024. In 2022 the Alberta government reported 642 horses in their Sundre Zone count (a number consistent with our count) but one year later they counted 969 horses. That level of population increase in such a short period of time is not biologically possible. It turns out they just flew further and longer than in previous years (and didn't report that fact), so it's no surprise they counted more horses and we expect they probably double counted many horses as well.

Doing aerial counts requires flying the same flight path year after year as that's the only way to accurately determine numbers in target areas from one year to the next. Changing flight paths and the time and distance flown each year

results in fluctuating, mostly meaningless, count numbers. The Alberta government has also done it's 2024 counting and we're now waiting to find out what they came up with.

It's clear the horse population has been relatively stable and may actually be decreasing in areas. There's no evidence of exponential growth and the government of Alberta has yet to show us any damage to the environment caused by wild horses.

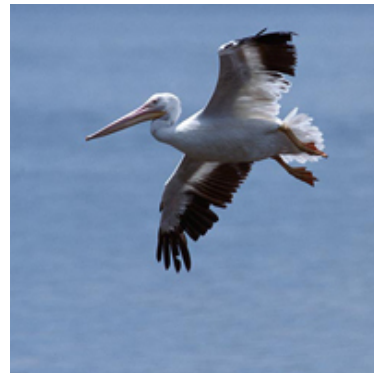
So why are wild horses a perpetual target? We believe it's because of complaints from cattle and resource extraction special interests who just want things to remain like they were in the past and who see the horses as a nuisance. As well, the idea that wild horses don't belong is an entrenched belief in some people, including wildlife managers, even though it's outdated and unscientific.

We'll have more on the wild horse issue, what the future holds and how you can help in upcoming newsletters.

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## New study suggests culling animals who 'don't belong' can be a flawed nature conservation practice

This February 1, 2024 Phys Org article provides excellent, much needed commentary about the often misguided persecution of animal species that are viewed, often for completely erroneous reasons, as not belonging.



Throughout the years Zoocheck has worked on numerous initiatives aimed at protecting wildlife that has been characterized by government and/or special interest groups as being unwelcome. Those unwelcome animals have included returned native wildlife species, new wildlife species expanding their ranges naturally or that are capitalizing on new conditions created by human activity or who fill an important ecological niche or role that they or other species filled in the past. Many of them, such as cormorants in the Great Lakes have been ruthlessly slaughtered by the tens of thousands. There are many more just like them.

This article offers a different perspective on the culling of animals who "don't belong" that we hope will take hold in future.

[Read the full article](#)

## City of London vs. Reptilia court case coming soon (March 18th)

Last year, the City of London (Ontario) initiated a court action against the Reptilia zoo after it opened up a Westmount Shopping Center location in April. Many of the exhibits were populated with animals that are prohibited or restricted by London's Animal Control Bylaw PH-3 and Reptilia did not have permission to keep them.



Reptilia had sought City of London permission to keep prohibited and restricted animals several times in the past, but each time they did Council rejected making changes to Animal Control By-Law PH-3 or to other bylaws to accommodate their requests.

Similar by-law exemptions had been sought by Reptilia for potential locations in Toronto and St. Catharines as well, but both cities refused to provide them.

In London Reptilia officials claim their business is already exempt from the Animal Control By-Law because they hold a provincial license under the Ontario Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (FWCA) that allows the keeping of certain native wildlife species in captivity. However that license does not extend to exotic, non-native wildlife that are not listed in the FWCA and does not qualify any person or business holding it to be exempt from other laws.

The court date on this issue is March 18th. The next edition of this newsletter will contain an update on the Reptilia London issue.

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## The Royalmount Aquarium moves slowly forward

*Will a new aquarium in a shopping mall be a serious education or conservation entity or will it be just another animal-based entertainment facility that hopes to increase its customer base by being in a location that maintains high concentrations of human traffic?*



The Royalmount Aquarium in the Town of Mount Royal, Quebec, has quietly moved forward, seemingly with little public scrutiny or attention. Other than a few local media articles and a basic aquarium website containing nice looking renderings and vague statements about conservation, education, animal welfare, sustainability and tourism, there doesn't seem to be very much information available at all.

Times have changed and more people today are sensitive about the treatment of animals and about the keeping of wildlife in captivity. The people behind the

Royalmount Aquarium should be far more transparent than they've been and provide a lot more detail about what they're planning. And the Town of Mount Royal should have conducted a public consultation about the aquarium project as well. It is not too late to do so.

In our next newsletter, we'll provide more detail about this issue and how you can help. In the meantime, please click the link below to read an opinion piece by long-time local Montreal wildlife advocate Georges Dupras who offers his views about why, before they are even built, aquariums and zoos are already dated and out of sync with the times.

[Read the full article](#)



### **Bill S-241 (the Jane Goodall Act) withdrawn, but *Bill S-15, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act* moves on**

On February 12, 2024, the Senate of Canada made a decision to remove Bill S-241 An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (great apes, elephants and certain other animals) from its agenda. The decision was the result of a procedural intervention by Senator Don Plett during the second reading debate on Bill S-15 on February 8th. Plett had raised a point of order that Bill S-15 was the same as Bill S-241 and therefore violated Senate rules.

While the two bills both addressed elephant and Great Ape protection issues, amongst other items, they did contain considerable differences as well.

However, the threat that Bill S-15, which has the greatest chance of passing because it is government legislation in the Senate and has procedural priority prompted the removal of Bill S-241.

Bill S-241 received a great deal of support and the research, consultations and deliberations that occurred while the Bill was in process will help inform the continuing Bill S-15 process.

In the interest of elephant, Great Ape and wildlife protection Zoocheck and our colleague organizations, will be pushing to make Bill S-15 as strong as possible and will be supporting the Bill as it moves forward.

# The Collaborative Learning College presents: Eco Grief

This 6-session writing group is designed for people coping with grief, anxiety, hopelessness, and dread as it relates to the destruction of our precious earth and the climate crisis.

By making space for, listening to, and honouring our ecological grief, we can find our way through to feeling more resilient, empowered, connected and hopeful.

REGISTER AT  
[CLC.CAMH.CA](https://CLC.CAMH.CA)

Thursdays,  
March 14- April 18  
1pm-3pm EST  
Virtual



**Collaborative  
Learning College**  
at camh

## Feeling low about the state of the world

Reenergize yourself to feel more resilient, empowered and hopeful. Sign up for ECO GRIEF, a special multi-session working group conducted by author, veterinarian and Zoocheck board member Nadja Lubiw-Hazard. Program runs from March 14 - April 18.

[Combat Eco Grief - Register Here](#)

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## Support Zoocheck's Wildlife Protection work!

Join with us as we continue to push forward and win victories for animals held in captivity and free-roaming in the wild by making a tax-deductible contribution today!

[Donate](#)



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