



ZOOCHECK NEWS & VIEWS! FALL 2024

Our periodic e-newsletter featuring news, events and updates.

2024 CHARITABLE DONATIONS CAN BE MADE UNTIL FEBRUARY 28, 2025

Yesterday, the Government of Canada announced an extension of the deadline for making charitable donations eligible for tax support in the 2024 tax year, until February 28, 2025. So, if you wanted to make a year-end donation in support of Zoocheck's work and receive a 2024 tax receipt, you haven't missed out.

If you would still like to make a 2024 donation, you can do so by credit card by clicking the blue DONATE button below (It links to the Zoocheck website online donation form) or you can to give us a call by phone at (416) 285-1744. If you want to mail a contribution by cheque, we have to receive it by February 28, 2025.

Thank you for your support of our work to help wild animals held in captivity

and free-roaming in the wild.

Donate

Despite stable populations and no evidence of environmental damage Alberta wild horses may face culls this winter.

Indications are that Alberta government officials intend to once again cull wild horse numbers by capturing individuals for "adoption" purposes, in addition to employing immuno-contraception to prevent breeding. The removal of wild horses may occur at some point over the next several months at a time when many mares will be pregnant or even nursing young foals.

Alberta's wild horses are an ecologically, culturally and historically important wild species who have been scapegoated for causing rangeland damage that is actually the result of human actions. They have been inappropriately targeted for control and reduction when there is no evidence they're a significant problem now or will be in future.

For years, Zoocheck, along with other wild horse protection groups and scientific advisors have vigorously challenged Alberta's claim that the small number of wild horses currently existing in the province are causing "ecological damage." On the contrary, horses evolved in North America and only became absent in Canada a few thousand years ago, when humans first arrived and there was significant climate change. They belong on the Alberta landscape.

Government officials have never been able to provide any meaningful evidence in support of their environmental damage claim. And, interestingly, during the recent past, they have changed their arguments and are now claiming it is not about damage, it is now, apparently, about forage allocation.

Changing arguments is something we've seen across Canada when we work on wildlife management issues. When one argument is challenged and dismantled or proven untrue, governments often bring forward another argument and continue to do what they were doing.

Alberta officials have set a maximum number of 1700 wild horses that are allowed to exist in the province, a number that makes no sense at all. As far as we can tell, it's an arbitrary number that has no scientific basis whatsoever.

Officials have divided wild horse populations into a number of Equine Management Zones (EMZ), each with their own maximum allowable number of horses. One very large EMZ allows only 30 wild horses, an incredibly small population size that isn't genetically sustainable and that could easily be depleted or eradicated. But if more than 30 horses are counted in that EMZ,

culls may then be on the table for consideration.

Alberta officials seem to be hoping that wild horse removals for adoption purposes, along with immuno-contraception to stop breeding, will convince the public that they're managing wild horses in a responsible, humane way. But with such a remarkably small wild horse population and no proof that management is even required, it's fair to ask why taxpayer dollars are being wasted on these activities, especially when they could play a significant role in the demise of Alberta's treasured wild horses.

It is also worth noting that wild horse culls for adoption are not only traumatic and cruel to the horses being removed, they also cause disruption, distress and trauma to the wild horse families and social groups that they are removed from. And immuno-contraception can also be inhumane and disruptive to the welfare of wild horses. These are not tame ranch horses, polo ponies, or children's pets – they are wild animals, living free and surviving in as close to wilderness conditions as exist in the province, and they are vulnerable.

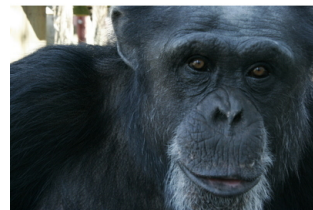
In addition to being an ecologically valuable component of Alberta's wild landscapes and ecosystems, wild horses have tremendous potential economic value to Albertans. The proximity of wild horses to Calgary and Red Deer, make them among the most accessible and easy to view wild horses in the world, giving Canadians and international tourists, an ability to observe and appreciate them and for the local businesses and the province to benefit.

To add your voice to the call for wild horse protections in Alberta, please click the link below.

[More info & how to help](#)

Senate passes Bill S-15 through Third Reading, so it now moves on to the House of Commons

In mid-December, Bill S-15 (to protect elephants and Great Apes) was passed by the Senate, so it will now move on to the House of Commons where it will go through a similar three step process in order to become law.



Bill S-15 moves on without several proposed amendments, supported by animal welfare groups and a number of zoos, including a NOAH clause that would have allowed for additional animal species to be afforded the protections contained in S-15 in future.

Bill S-15 is now back to being focused on elephants and Great Apes and

several other issues that were in the Bill when it entered the Senate Committee 2nd Reading stage. However, Bill S-15 is still enormously important and will be a major step forward for animals in Canada should it be passed. Zoocheck and our colleague organizations will be pushing for passage of Bill S-15 as quickly as possible in the new year.



Public left in the dark about status of London agreement with Reptilia

Since 2017, commercial zoo business Reptilia has been trying to set up a third Ontario location in London and in April 2023 they managed to do that.

However, Reptilia's new location was opened without the business obtaining an exemption from London's Animal Control By-Law PH-3 that would allow them to keep prohibited and restricted animals.

On three previous occasions, in 2018, 2022 and 2023, London City Council chose not to make any changes to their animal control or business licensing bylaws to accommodate the Reptilia business. Reptilia opened with animals not allowed in the city regardless. That prompted the City to launch a legal action against Reptilia that, if successful, would require them to comply with London's by-law. A trial date was set for March 2024.

Shortly before the trial date, the City announced that there was an offer to settle the case with Reptilia, but no details were made public. The City subsequently appeared briefly in court, on nine separate occasions, and each time they asked for an adjournment, saying settlement discussions were continuing. They didn't seek a tenth adjournment in early December, so the status of the situation is unknown and, as of this writing, the City has "still" not released any information about what's going on.

It's no secret that London residents have expressed concern about captive wildlife in London for years, so the City should be transparent and let everyone know what's going on. Please send a short email to the London City Council members who, in 2023, voted against changing their by-laws to accommodate new zoo businesses, including Reptilia, and ask them what's going on.

[Email London City Council](#)

More support for municipal resolution urging Ontario to regulate exotic wildlife

Zoocheck has been promoting World Animal



Protection's municipal resolution that urges Ontario to finally regulate exotic wildlife in captivity. The numbers of endorsing municipalities and relevant municipal associations is growing with each passing week.

Ontario is the only Canadian province that doesn't regulate exotic wild animals in captivity in any way. Unless there's a local bylaw against it, anyone can keep lions, tigers, monkeys and bears. The lack of provincial laws and regulations force municipalities to deal with exotic animal problems, when they lack the necessary expertise and resources to do so.

Nearly three dozen municipalities and many municipal associations have already endorsed the resolution, but more are needed and you can help make that happen by taking the following three steps.

Familiarize yourself with the resolution and the background information in the briefing note. [Links to both are available here.](#)

Contact your municipal councillor or Mayor and request a meeting (phone or Zoom is good, but in-person has the most impact) to discuss your municipality endorsing the resolution. Make sure they haven't already endorsed the resolution.

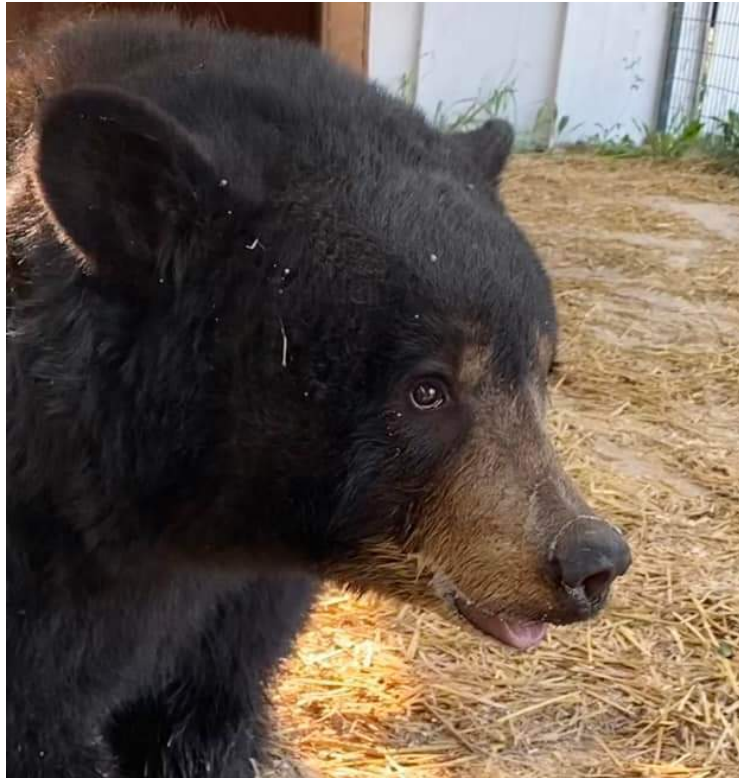
Meet with your municipal representative, share some key points, and give them a copy of the proposed resolution. Ask them to take steps to have the resolution endorsed by your municipality.

Saving Blueberry the Black Bear

Recently, Zoocheck and Black Bear Rescue Manitoba (BBRM) worked to move Blueberry, a female black bear with serious health issues to a world-class sanctuary in the United States.

Blueberry came to BBRM in the fall of 2023, apparently suffering from

neurological damage which made her unable to stand. By spring she had still not fully recovered and didn't have the motor skills she would need to survive in the wild. Zoocheck helped cover the costs of an MRI that confirmed she had a neurological issue that made her release impossible.



The BBRM experts noted she seemed somewhat content living in the rescue

center's limited space and benefited from the enrichment they provided. They also noted that her neurological damage seemed to have reduced her drive to wander over long distances, unlike her wild counterparts.

The BBRM decided not to allow Blueberry to be euthanized but the BBRM lacks the capacity to keep bears permanently, so the question became where could Blueberry go? Zoocheck stepped up again to find the best possible location for Blueberry.

Zoocheck arranged for Blueberry to go to the Wisconsin Black Bear Education Center (WBBEC) which has large, natural enclosures where Blueberry would be able to do the things bears do.

With Zoocheck's help, BBRM moved Blueberry to the WBBEC in mid-October and she seems to be doing very well.

We were happy to help Blueberry and look forward to hearing more about her in the future. Thanks so much to the team at BBRM and to WBBEC owner Jeff Traska for ensuring Blueberry can enjoy space, natural forest and an opportunity to do many of the things that all bears should be able to do.



Shankar's plight and memories of Toronto Zoo elephants

Guest commentary by Shubhobroto Ghosh

In July 2012 I visited the Toronto Zoo during my first visit to Canada. At the time, there was a raging storm of controversy about the plight of the zoo's three resident African elephants, named Toka, Thika and Iringa. They were enduring conditions, including a small enclosure and cold Canadian winters, that failed to satisfy their full range of needs. When the zoo decided to terminate its keeping of elephants, largely due to cost, Canadian NGO Zoocheck promoted the idea of retiring them to a world-renowned sanctuary in the United States, instead of to another zoo. The Zoocheck campaign navigated through a broad range of challenges and, against all odds, ultimately led to the organization transporting the elephants to the Performing Animal Welfare Society's ARK 2000 facility in central California in 2013.

Remarkably, zoo officials, zoo supporters and multiple zoo organizations had vigorously opposed moving the elephants to a sanctuary, but Toronto City Council, recognizing what was in the best interests of elephant welfare, agreed with Zoocheck and voted for the sanctuary option. It was a remarkable instance of the welfare of elephants being given priority ahead of all other interests.

Ten years later, on the other side of the world, in Delhi Zoo in India, a lone African elephant was making news for all the wrong reasons. Shankar, a male African elephant, gifted by the government of Zimbabwe to the President of India in 1998, was offered a new life by a Delhi High Court case filed by Nikita Dhawan with an offer of rehabilitation by Damian Aspinall, Chairman of the Aspinall Foundation, the leading zoo establishment in the world specializing in the release of captive zoo animals to the wild.

The petition before the Delhi High Court suggested that Shankar could be rehabilitated successfully to the African wild, with proper preparation and help

from the Aspinall Foundation. The Foundation had already initiated a monumental effort to release its entire herd of 13 captive African elephants in Howletts Zoo in Kent in England to Tsavo National Park in Kenya. Unfortunately, for Shankar however, the Delhi High Court turned down the case and he is still in solitary captivity in Delhi Zoo.

I have personally followed the life of Shankar almost since the time he arrived. I saw him and his mate Vambai, in Delhi Zoo, in 2000, and, even then, I was struck by the inappropriate nature of their incarceration. Vambai died in 2001, as a result of not being able to acclimatize to the new environment.

Throughout the years, I saw Shankar go through many phases in his life, including physical abuse by his keepers, long periods of swaying, indicative of abnormal stereotypic behaviour, and his unsteady gait, indicative of a traumatic past.

I last saw Shankar on 31 October, 2024. He was still in social isolation and spending long amounts of time rubbing himself against the wall of his shed, with nothing to do and very little enrichment to alleviate his loneliness. Perspectives are changing but perhaps not fast enough for elephants like Shankar.

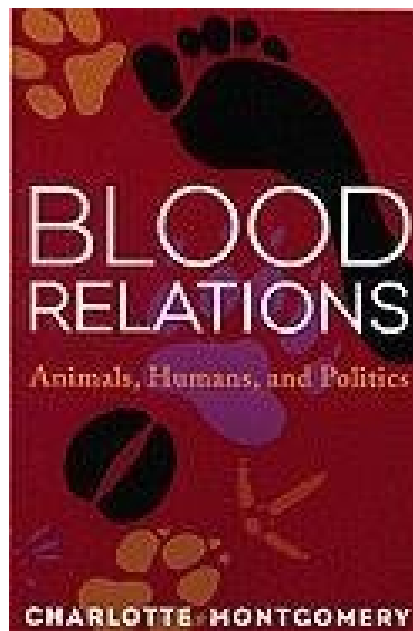
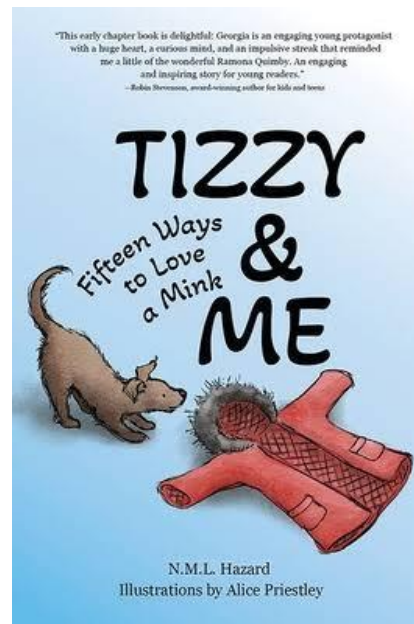
Visiting zoo animals like Shankar make me ponder a new book on animal rights, titled, 'Pedaling Resistance: Sympathy, Subversion and Vegan Cycling' edited by Carol J Adams and Michael D Wise, with a foreword by Marc Bekoff, that critically examines the concept of speciesism, or discrimination against animals on illogical grounds. This applies to captive zoo animals like elephants, who are now, finally, being considered as being worthy of many of the same rights that humans have.

In a recent scientific journal paper entitled, 'Continuing challenges of elephant captivity: the captive environment, health issues, and welfare implication,' by Catherine Doyle, Lori Marino and Bob Jacobs et.al, mentions that, "On a global scale, some countries are reevaluating whether they should keep elephants in captivity or provide additional protections for captive elephants. In 2021, for example, the United Kingdom began ongoing discussions on banning elephants in zoos because of the challenges of providing them with a healthy environment (Aoraha, 2021; Atkinson & Lindsay, 2022). Proposed legislation in Canada (i.e., Bill S-15, introduced in 2023) aims to prohibit possessing, breeding, or impregnating elephants (and great apes) in captivity and to prohibit using them for entertainment purposes (Senate of Canada, 2023)." India too had prohibited the display of elephants in zoos in 2009, but the directive did not succeed because of lack of alternatives.

Since the three Toronto Zoo elephants were moved to California, Iringa has passed away. However, Toka and Thika continue to experience the expanse of their large enclosures, grazing, running, climbing hills, swimming and doing many of the things that elephants should be allowed to do. One only hopes that

captive African elephants in India, like Shankar and Rambo, will obtain similar respite before it is too late.

Shubhobroto Ghosh is Wildlife Campaign Manager at World Animal Protection in India and author of *Dreaming In Calcutta* And *Channel Islands*.



Reading for Kids and Adults

TIZZY & ME, Fifteen Ways to Love a Mink by N.M.L. Hazard

Available through all traditional and online booksellers

Published just last month, this early chapter book for children 7 - 9 years old, *TIZZY AND ME: Fifteen Ways to Love a Mink* is a funny, endearing, and page—turning story of friendship and learning how to stand up for what you believe

in.

On the first snowy day of school, seven—year—old Georgia is upset to discover that her best friend Winona is wearing a coat made with real fur. What comes next is a battle to help her friend understand and Georgia?with the comforting presence of her dog, Tizzy - must find a way to make things right. As the two girls learn more about animals that live in fur farms, they realize they must stand up for them - but how can they help the minks and make a difference?

BLOOD RELATIONS, Animals, Humans and Politics by Charlotte Montgomery

Available through many used book outlets

Published nearly 25 years ago, and picking up several years after the animal rights movement first began in Canada, Blood Relations explores the misunderstood world of what was then a nascent movement. Ridiculed by angry industries, vilified by scientists, and largely ignored by the media and the left, the grassroots animal rights phenomenon enlisted a new generation of activists dedicated to changing the most basic political arrangements on the planet. Meet the people involved and the issues they raise. From activists who trade time in jail to save animals' lives to advocates who fight to make humans recognize that we are only one species among many with legitimate claims. Blood Relations also asks why cruel and pointless animal research goes on in near total secrecy, despite its public funding? Why does agriculture get a blanket exemption to routinely treat animals in ways that would bring criminal charges in a city setting? And aren't the outcomes predictable when a political movement with a small but skillful outlaw wing is deliberately excluded from the political agenda?

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!

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