



## ZOOCHECK NEWS & VIEWS! SPRING/SUMMER 2025

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

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### Zoos in Ontario, Canada and abroad

Canada's summer zoo season is now in full swing with roadside zoos and zoo-type attractions open to the public and captive wild animals showing up at children's camps and other venues across the country.



At the present time, no new provincial wildlife in captivity legislation has yet been proposed for Ontario, although we fully expect it later in the year. In the meantime, Zoocheck is engaged in a series of investigative visits and local campaigns aimed at applying pressure on specific facilities and practices, promoting local laws and law enforcement and raising awareness about a number of wildlife captivity issues in key sectors. We'll be posting information about some of these activities over the next month or two.

Zoocheck is also providing key support to other wildlife in captivity initiatives outside of Ontario and Canada, including a deep dive investigative look at two established Canadian zoos, providing support for a potentially precedent-setting US zoo initiative and working on a follow-up investigation of solitary elephants in Japan that continues our joint project with the Elephants in Japan organization.

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### Zoocheck and Animal Alliance take aim at Manitoba's spring bear hunt

Zoocheck has joined forces with Animal Alliance of Canada in an initiative to end Manitoba's spring bear hunt. While we do not support any hunting of bears or other animals, spring bear hunting is particularly harmful since bears are the only large mammal hunted in the spring while cubs are still reliant on their

mothers for food and protection and where hunters are permitted to set up bait stations to ensure they can kill bears without significant effort.

Provincial records show that most of the bears killed in Manitoba's spring bear hunt are shot by foreign, big game hunters who come to the province to kill bears with the assistance of local guides. Hunting guides set up bait stations loaded with meat and sugary treats to attract bears in advance of the hunt. Then hunters only need to sit up in a tree blind and wait for the unsuspecting bears to come to the bait to shoot them.

Even though hunters are not supposed to kill females with cubs, each year as many as 224 cubs are orphaned because it is not possible to reliably tell a mother bear from others because of the thickness of their fur and the fact that mother bears hide their cubs in trees prior to going to forage for food, so they will arrive at the bait station alone. Very few orphaned cubs are ever found, leaving the majority to die from starvation, exposure or predation by adult male bears or other wild animals.

In addition to the cruelty involved with the orphaning of defenseless cubs, this practice of baiting bears likely contributes to human bear conflict since bears are being baited with human foods and can be set up as close as 200 meters of a residence or 500 meters of a campground or cottage community. Studies show that hunting does not reduce human bear conflict and in many cases the number of conflicts in hunted areas is actually higher than in other areas.

We hope you will join us by sending a quick email to Manitoba's Premier Wab Kinew and the Minister of Natural Resources and Indigenous Futures, Ian Bushie, and urge them to end the cruel spring bear hunt. Your email can be as brief or as long as you want.

EMAIL:

**PREMIER WAB KINEW and  
MINISTER IAN BUSHIE**

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## Wild Horse Campaign Moves Forward

Zoocheck has long been an advocate for the protection of wild horses in western Canada, with most of our efforts since the mid-1990s focused on populations of Alberta Mountain Horses.

Throughout the years, Zoocheck has produced numerous expert reports and other materials challenging erroneous Alberta government and private interest claims that wild horses shouldn't be roaming the wilds of Alberta and that they shouldn't be considered as a re-naturalized native wildlife species, even though horses evolved in western Canada before spreading to other parts of the world.

So far, in 2025, Zoocheck partnered with the Alberta-based organization HAWS on an expanded wild horse counts in the Alberta foothills. Our independent counts throughout the years show that the suggestion horse numbers are growing out of control are completely false and that horse numbers, while they are somewhat dynamic, remain relatively stable.

Zoocheck also engaged a professional polling firm to survey the opinions of Albertans on wild horse issues. The poll revealed an overwhelming majority of Alberta residents want the Alberta government to stop removing (culling) wild horses from the landscape and, instead, would like the government to provide greater protections for the horses.

There were indications late last year and early this year that the Alberta government was considering culling a number of wild horses during the spring, so, together with our organizational allies, Zoocheck helped to generate a very large number of emails and letters from Albertans to their elected provincial representatives urging them to leave the horses alone. No cull took place this spring as a result, but we still have a lot of work to do to prevent culling in future years because old attitudes about wild horses and continued pressure from private industry interests still see the horses as a nuisance and want them removed or reduced to non-sustainable token numbers.

While the effort to protect Alberta Mountain Horses still faces an intransigent Alberta government and industry influence, gradually public attitudes are changing and more people than ever want the wild horses to remain and to be protected. Zoocheck is committed to pushing forward to convince Alberta politicians that wild horses have important ecological, historical and cultural value to Alberta and should remain on the landscape.

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## Zoocheck's wild horse effort expands to the Yukon Territory

Earlier this year Zoocheck's wild horse initiative was expanded to include the Yukon Territory. We have joined forces with Friends of the Yukon Wild Horses by purchasing additional trail cameras for the group to better monitor the wild horses and to help determine their actual numbers and range. Additionally, we are working to help set up a DNA study of the Yukon wild horses and hope to fund a report outlining the DNA lineage of the horses. Stay tuned for more information during the coming months.

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## Working to help "forgotten" captive turtles in Ontario

From time to time Zoocheck receives calls from members of the public expressing concern about native Ontario turtles, licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, being kept in poor conditions, sometimes for decades. These turtles deserve much better but placement opportunities for them are few and far between. We decided to do something about that.

Zoocheck is now working to develop a rescue facility for permanent placement of non-releasable, native turtles in Southern Ontario.

Sadly, turtles and other reptiles have historically been viewed as simple animals with only rudimentary husbandry needs, but nothing could be further from the truth. It is now known that reptiles, including aquatic turtles, have advanced cognitive, emotional and social capacities, and that they need space, physical and mental stimulation, complex flexible environments, choice and control over their lives, and pretty much everything else that other animals in captivity need.

Turtles who are forced to live their lives in barren, glass tanks that lack meaningful opportunities to swim, forage, dig, bask, socialize and more are not living fulfilled, natural lives. And some turtles don't understand that they can't get through transparent barriers (i.e., glass) so they spend inordinate amounts of time swimming and clawing at the glass trying to get to the area they can see beyond the tank wall. It's the turtle version of the pacing big cats and other animals do in zoo cages. In truth, turtles live far more complex lives than most people know and they require facilities that can accommodate most, if not all, of their real biological and behavioural needs.

Zoocheck is now in dialogue with several sanctuaries as we search for a suitable location to set up a rescue facility. Once set up, the facility will also serve a public education function, by providing educational materials about turtle conservation, protection and welfare, guidance on how to rescue turtles found on roads or in other vulnerable situations and more. We want to do whatever we can to help ensure turtles and other reptiles remain in the wild unharmed.

More news on this exciting initiative soon.

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## **Zoocheck provides funding to Southwestern Ontario At Risk Reptiles**

We are pleased to announce that Zoocheck has provided funding to the Southwestern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR) initiative, a successful internationally renowned grassroots research, recovery, education and conservation advocacy program. SOARR has made considerable progress in protecting wild reptiles and the habitats they live in, and has been leading recovery efforts of the Eastern Spiny Soft-Shelled Turtle populations in the Maitland River. We look forward to providing additional support to SOARR in the future as we push forward to protect reptiles in captivity and in the wild.

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## **Reptilia hits news again in London, while City Council still remains silent on Reptilia situation**

Despite London City Council refusing to change its animal control bylaw so

that Reptilia could legally keep prohibited and restricted reptiles in the City, in April 2023 Reptilia opened a zoo at the Westmount Shopping Center with many animals not allowed in the City.

That prompted the City to launch a legal action against Reptilia that, if successful, would have required them to comply with London's by-law. After numerous delays 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.

For months, the case was listed on the court's weekly case list with a view to it being scheduled for hearing, then settlement discussions. In November 2024, when the matter was not confirmed, the court struck it from the list. Once a motion is struck from the list it won't appear again unless the party who filed the motion originally (the City of London) re-files, re-serves and pay the required fee again. The City has not provided any information to the public about what's going on since that happened.

It seems the case is still officially active as we are not aware of an order granting or dismissing or otherwise dealing with the application or its merits or anything else. But for those of us on the outside looking in, we have no idea what's actually going on. So far, our efforts to acquire more information have not been successful and the City of London has remained silent.

While all this has been going on, Reptilia has been in the news for another reason. On June 27th [CTV News reported that Reptilia is being sued by the Westmount Shopping Center](#) for alleged non-payment of rent from October 2024 - February 2025. Reptilia has filed a countersuit

The Reptilia London issue is developing week by week, so Zoocheck will post more information as it progresses. Stay tuned.



## Writing Wild: The More Than Human World (workshop)

Ontario writers and aspiring writers take note. A 4 week in-person creative writing workshop with author and Zoocheck board member Nadja Lubiw-Hazard is scheduled to take place from July 22 - August 12, 2025 at the St.

Matthew's Clubhouse in Toronto.

Nadjia Lubiw-Hazard is the author of numerous stories, articles and the books *Tizzy and Me*, *Fifteen Ways to Love a Mink* and *The Nap-Away Motel*

[More Information](#)



### Zoocheck is now on BlueSky - Sign up today!

Zoocheck is now on alternative social media platform Bluesky. If you're a Bluesky user or want to sign up to Bluesky, please be sure to follow Zoocheck. Make sure to check out Bluesky at the link below.

[Bluesky](#)

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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!

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