



## **ZOOCHECK NEWS & VIEWS! SPRING/SUMMER 2026**

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

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### **LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD: 2026 MID-YEAR UPDATE**

We're now almost halfway through 2026, and it has already proven to be a challenging year.

In addition to advancing Zoocheck's long-standing campaigns to address the many forms of exploitation of wildlife in captivity, we have also continued our efforts to end the needless persecution of wildlife species across Canada, the animals who are all too often scapegoated for problems, often more imagined than real, that are caused by human activities.

We are also pleased to be able to partner with and support a number of other important initiatives that align with our mission to promote animal welfare, wildlife protection, and evidence-based public policy.

Additionally, we're excited to report that development of our online animal advocacy training program is progressing well, and we look forward to launching it before the end of the year. We believe this program will provide advocates with practical tools and strategies to help create meaningful change for animals and wildlife.

In this edition of our e-newsletter, you'll find several important updates, announcements and recommended reading that we expect you will find informative and thought-provoking. If you have questions about other aspects of Zoocheck's work or about campaigns and projects not mentioned in this newsletter, please let us know.

Thank you for your continued interest in and enthusiasm for

Zoocheck's wildlife protection efforts. Your support truly makes a difference and helps us continue working toward a better future for animals and wildlife.

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## **HELP ZOOCHECK MONITOR MOBILE LIVE ANIMAL PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC SETTINGS IN ONTARIO**

Mobile Live Animal Programs (MLAPs) in Ontario are unregulated and untracked, so they fly under the official radar. They ply their trade across the province, shunting animals from one location to another in cars, vans and trucks, showing up in a community for a day or two and then leaving. They may feature sloths, monkeys, wild cats, capybaras, kangaroos, reptiles and much more.



Since they're always moving around and are often only advertised on a local basis, they are very difficult for us to track. Because Zoocheck is the only group attempting to monitor this newly emerged industry, we could use your help.

If you see any advertisements or hear about MLAPs coming to your area of Southern Ontario, please send us the details

MLAP business activities may include mobile zoos or wildlife exhibits, animal stage shows or presentations, animal encounters or “meet and greets”, reptile presentations or shows, animal photo sessions, children's petting zoos, and other similar events involving live animals. Audiences for some of these events may include members of the public deemed by public health agencies as being vulnerable to the kinds of infectious diseases that are transferable from exotic animals to humans.

MLAPs may take place at children's events and summer camps, schools and libraries, retail outlets and shopping malls, fairs and festivals, nursing homes, seniors' residences and hospitals, corporate events and conferences, churches and other religious institutions and other locations where the public has access.

If an MLAP is coming to your area please forward details to

Zoocheck, including the date, location, name of the host or sponsoring organization or business, the name of the MLAP business and, if available, a photo of the advertisement or flyer.

Please forward information to: [zoocheck@zoocheck.com](mailto:zoocheck@zoocheck.com)

Your help is important because it enhances our ongoing efforts to monitor and assess the size of the MLAP (Mobile Live Animal Program) sector and assists us in determining the actual number of MLAPs and the kinds of activities they offer in public settings. Thank you in advance for helping to track the MLAP industry.

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## **WILDLIFE IN CAPTIVITY UPDATE**

### **ZOOS IN ONTARIO:**

The number of roadside zoos and private menageries in Ontario is far lower than the numbers that existed in the past but they are still a problem. Zoocheck continues to employ a number of different strategies to keep the wildlife in captivity issue on the Ontario government's radar screen including a new investigation of Ontario zoos this summer. We also continue to work with our colleague organizations in pushing for a legislative resolution to the zoo problem in Ontario, as well as engaging in initiatives aimed at addressing local problems associated with zoos, mobile zoos and the private possession of exotic wildlife.

### **EXOTIC ANIMALS IN BC:**

Zoocheck has been supporting the Vancouver Humane Society's (VHS) campaign to convince the British Columbia government to regulate mobile zoos and to strengthen the province's Controlled Alien Species Regulation (CASR) by adding additional, very problematic, animal species to its list of regulated species. Just months ago, the Union of BC Municipalities endorsed a resolution distributed by the VHS calling on the province to deal with mobile zoos and to strengthen the CASR. Their endorsement provided a considerable boost to the campaign. We're pleased to be able to support and participate in this effort as it moves forward.

### **MARINELAND BEARS UPDATE:**

We're happy to report that the nearly dozen bears that were left at the now defunct Marineland amusement park/zoo in Niagara Falls, Ontario have been safely transported to The Wild Animal Sanctuary (TWAS) in Colorado, the world's largest carnivore sanctuary. Zoocheck played a small, but important, part in making it happen. Last fall when we found out that Marineland was

actively looking for placement opportunities for animals, we contacted key players at TWAS to make sure they were connected with the representatives of Marineland. Zoocheck has worked with TWAS in the past, so we knew they were the only facility that could take all of Marineland's bears and provide them with outstanding conditions. The bears were moved several weeks ago and are now living in profoundly enhanced and enriched conditions - a great end to a tragic story.

#### **SOLITARY ELEPHANTS IN JAPAN:**

A new report has now been produced outlining the results of the fall 2025 Elephants in Japan (EIJ) / Zoocheck review of solitary elephants still held in Japanese zoos. The report, which is a follow up to a previous EIJ / Zoocheck report produced several years ago, will also be translated into Japanese and distributed to key stakeholders in the zoo industry, as well as various relevant government officials. Public release of the document will follow. We're pleased to be able to provide vital support and active engagement that allows the EIJ project to move forward with the aim of changing the elephant-keeping paradigm in Japan.

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### **TOKA PASSES AWAY AT THE PAWS SANCTUARY**

We are saddened to announce that Toka the elephant, one of the oldest elephants in North America and a former resident of the Toronto Zoo, passed away at the Performing Animal Welfare Society ARK 2000 sanctuary on May 28, 2026.

Toka arrived at the sanctuary on October 20, 2013, along with her companions Thika and Iringa. The trip was the result of a hard fought Zoocheck campaign to secure the release of the three African elephants and to plan and carry out their subsequent transfer to California.

At the sanctuary, the elephants were able to roam in extremely large, complex, natural paddocks where they could express a broad range of natural elephant behaviours and experience a far greater degree of autonomy than any zoo could provide. The day they arrived was the first day of a different, far more enriched and enjoyable life for them.



According to PAWS Co-Founder Ed Stewart, "Toka spent her days at the sanctuary immersed in nature, enjoying the warm California weather and a spacious environment where she could express natural elephant behaviors and live with dignity."

"PAWS was proud to provide Toka with expert daily and veterinary care, and we were honored to have her as a cherished member of the PAWS family for nearly 13 years. Toka will forever have a place in our hearts."

Toka was born into a wild elephant family in Mozambique, Africa and captured at approximately two years old. At just four years old, a time when Toka would have been by her mother's side, she was sent to the Toronto Zoo where she spent the next 39 years.

REST IN PEACE TOKA.

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## **A THOUGHT-PROVOKING ARTICLE ABOUT WHERE "RESCUED" ANIMALS WILL GO - FREE ALL THE CAPTIVE ELEPHANTS. AND PUT THEM WHERE EXACTLY?**

Throughout the world, dozens and dozens of initiatives are in play with the intent of freeing animals from various forms of exploitation. They include almost every kind of animal, from the the smallest to the largest, but often there isn't a lot of thought as to where these animals will go. While we would, of course, like them all to go to wonderful, natural sanctuary environments to live out the rest of their days, the reality is that there are not nearly enough sanctuary spaces to accommodate the multitude of animals that, potentially, may need homes in the future. This thought provoking May 28, 2026, article entitled *Free All The Captive Elephants. And Put Them Where Exactly?* by the Weeping Elephant Project's David Ebert poses some very relevant questions that should be part of the discussion about the role and capacity of sanctuaries to help rescued animals.

[Click here to read the article \(link to exterior site\)](#)

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## **WILDLIFE IN THE WILD UPDATE**

## **ONTARIO'S NATIVE REPTILES:**

**We're happy to report that Zoocheck has once again provided significant support to the Southwestern Ontario At Risk Reptiles (SOARR) program. Last year, this outstanding local, hands-on initiative that engages in conservation research, habitat restoration, incubation of turtle eggs and subsequent release of young, community education and more, produced more than 12,000 turtle hatchlings for release in key habitats in Ontario. We wanted to make sure that this outstanding project was able to do the same again this year.**



## **MANITOBA'S BLACK BEARS:**

**Zoocheck continued efforts to convince the Manitoba government to abandon its spring bear hunt that results in cubs becoming orphaned when their mothers are shot. In addition, Zoocheck is continuing to provide support to Black Bear Rescue Manitoba in its work to rehabilitate orphaned bear cubs for release back to the wild and in addressing local issues that may negatively impact the bear center.**

## **CORMORANTS IN THE GREAT LAKES:**

**Zoocheck's effort to stop the unjustified killing of cormorants in the Great Lakes Basin continued this year. New threats to a colony of cormorants on the Toronto Islands have emerged, so Zoocheck is now investigating how concerns and problems in that situation can be mitigated to everyone's satisfaction and prevent the killing of cormorants. Additionally, we are now involved in renewed research regarding several other threats facing cormorants in Ontario, on both provincial and federal lands.**

**It is interesting to note that the complaints about cormorants have shifted over the years and many of them are now largely focused on changes to vegetation where cormorants and, often, other colonial waterbirds, reside. Cormorants are just one of many ecosystem engineer wildlife species, that include beavers, prairie dogs and elephants, that alter the environments in which they live. Unfortunately, many people don't realize or accept that nature is dynamic and subject to change, so when cormorant activities result in modified habitats (e.g., dead trees), they believe something is wrong and many people then advocate that cormorants be killed. Instead of helping nature, they are advocating for the suppression of natural systems so that things look how they BELIEVE they should look, and not how nature**

dictates.

#### **NATIVE WILDLIFE & FERAL CATS UPDATE:**

Last fall, Zoocheck stepped up to help wildlife and feral cats by funding construction of a cat sanctuary building to house a small colony of cats that were being removed from a conservation area near Petrolia, Ontario. The cats were being removed to protect native wildlife living in the park from predation. Unfortunately, placement opportunities for the cats were not available, so Zoocheck solved the problem by funding the new facility, now operated by the Caregivers of Petrolia Ferals. We're happy to report that the conservation area is now cat-free and the cats that were removed are all doing well. In future years, the sanctuary building will be able to assist in similar situations and will be able to help dozens or hundreds of other cats in need.

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### **TRAINING COURSE COMING THIS FALL!**

**Strategic Animal Advocacy 101 (SAA101)** is a multi-week online program designed to provide new, novice, intermediate and even advanced advocates with a deeper understanding of strategic advocacy, campaigning, and the systems within

which advocates operate. During the course of the program new modules will be released periodically containing several presentations, along with required readings, suggested supplementary materials, and, in some cases, external videos or podcasts that participants are encouraged to review. All sessions are pre-recorded and participants work their own self-determined pace.

The program is built around a central premise: effective advocacy requires more than passion or concern about an issue. It requires an understanding of how systems function, how decisions are actually made, how influence is exercised, and how campaigns are structured and implemented in real-world situations.

Throughout this program, we will examine the political, legal, regulatory, institutional, and social systems that advocates work within and attempt to influence. We will also explore the principles of strategic advocacy and campaign development, including how campaigns are planned, organized, communicated,

adapted, and evaluated over time.

More information coming this summer!

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## BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

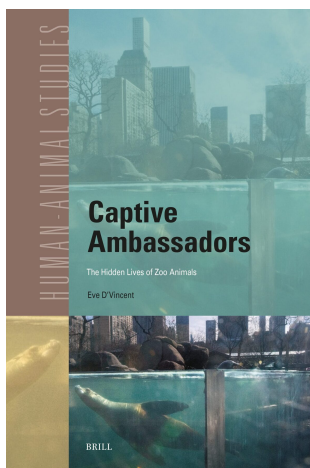
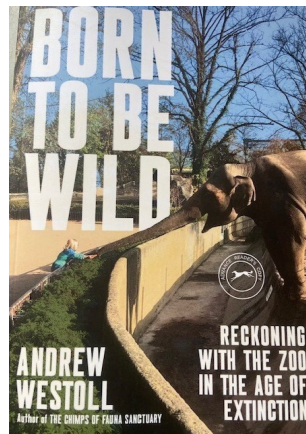
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### **Born To Be Wild, Reckoning With The Zoo In The Age of Extinction**

(Now available for Pre-Order)

In the thought-provoking *Born To Be Wild*, Canadian author Andrew Westoll examines the paradox of zoos in the modern age and whether or not they are vital institutions actually saving wildlife or cruel anachronisms that deny life and liberty to many of the planet's most amazing creatures. Using real life stories and experiences, he grapples with the role and function of zoos and whether the diminished lives of captive animals can be justified at a time when the world's wild places are nearing extinction.

**NOW AVAILABLE FOR PRE-ORDER** from all traditional and online book sellers.



### **Captive Ambassadors, The Hidden Lives of Zoo Animals**

In *Captive Ambassadors, The Hidden Lives of Zoo Animals* author Eve D'Vincent challenges the notion of zoo animals as "ambassadors" for their species, revealing the exploitative marketing tactics behind their individualized narratives. Drawing on cognitive and behavioral ethology, trans-species psychology, and critical anthropomorphism, this multidisciplinary work exposes how zoos fabricate biographies to mask the harsh reality of animals' lived experiences in captivity. It critiques the disruptions of animal culture caused by captive breeding programs and the tragic fate

of surplus animals deemed no longer useful. Advocating for authentic animal biographies and ethical engagement, this book argues for a shift in human-animal relations that honors animals as unique individuals with intrinsic value, transcending the confines of their captive roles.

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER](#)

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## **FOLLOW ZOOCHECK ON 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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## **Join Us In Creating a Better Future for Both Captive and Wild Animals!**

Join us as we continue protecting animals in captivity, defending wildlife in the wild, and advancing practical solutions that create lasting change. Your tax-deductible contribution today will help make future victories for animals in captivity and in the wild possible

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