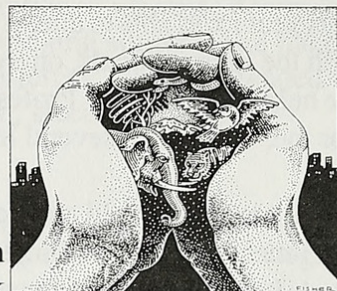


Conservation/Legislative Update

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This month's column was put together by
column co-coordinator Greg McKinney



Zoo Taunters Face Harsher Dues - After several incidents in which patrons of the San Francisco Zoo have either taunted the wildlife or snuck into enclosures containing dangerous animals, a city lawmaker is proposing to tighten laws and increase penalties for those who foolishly mingle with the city's animals. Supervisor Sean Elsbernd's proposal adds language to an existing law that prohibits entrance into habitats and enclosures, including the bison paddock in Golden Gate Park. The new law would specify that taunting or endangering animals in any city park is not allowed and would also heighten maximum fines for violations from \$500 to \$1,000. The lawmaker introduced the legislation after a man who snuck into the bear enclosure on 26 September not only managed to escape with his life, but also without punishment. A Superior Court judge tossed out a misdemeanor trespassing charge against the 21-year-old man after his public defender argued that he did not intend to stay in the enclosure.

"Turns out that you can't be charged with criminal trespass unless you occupy or otherwise live [in the space]," said Bob Jenkins, the zoo's vice president of institutional advancement. "Never mind that the trespasser had to be rescued, which endangered zookeepers and the bears," Jenkins said.

Shocked by the ruling, Elsbernd said the legislative branch needed to step in and "correct problems presented by the judicial branch." The current city law does not do enough to deter or hold accountable those who stupidly mingle with wildlife, Elsbernd said.

The problem is not new, particularly at San Francisco Zoo. No one can forget the 2007 Christmas Day tiger attack in which one of the animals leapt from its grotto and mauled three victims, killing one. Rumors swirled that the tiger had been taunted prior to the attack. The following year, a patron was caught tossing acorns at a rhinoceros. And later that year, a man was caught climbing the fence of the black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) enclosure. And those are only incidents in which violators were caught.

The incidents "indicate a need to make sure we have ordinances on the books that allow for appropriate penalties," said Jim Lazarus, president of the Recreation and Park Commission. Elsbernd's ordinance "makes [entering into zoo enclosures] outright illegal," and "confirms that it is a misdemeanor and accentuates the penalties," Jenkins said. "It's specific to the city of San Francisco and eliminates any confusion," he said.

The legislation is expected to be heard by the City Operations and Neighborhood Services Committee as early as March 2010. *Source: San Francisco Examiner, Mike Aldox, 11 January 2010*



Bengal Tiger (Photo by Paul Mannix/Wikipedia)

India Launches Tigernet - A website launched by Jairam Ramesh, Hon. Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Environment and Forests will give tiger reserve directors and chief wildlife wardens in India the ability to key-in crucial information about tiger deaths, poaching and seizures. The Tigernet website, (www.tigernet.nic.in) will be the first consolidated database on mortality and poaching related to tigers and other protected species within tiger reserves. Gathering accurate information on such tiger activities is crucial to assisting anti-poaching efforts. The new system will allow enforcement officers to record information on tiger mortalities, to monitor patterns of where poaching incidents are occurring and use this information to strengthen anti-poaching efforts.

TRAFFIC has helped develop the new website, in collaboration with the government's National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). The information will be available in the public domain, while Field Directors and Chief Wildlife Wardens will be required to log in to key in information on tiger-related issues. The accurate reporting of tiger deaths and the circumstances surrounding them has been a contentious issue in India, with conflicting information from official sources and NGOs, and accusations of secrecy over some findings.

It is anticipated the new website will simplify the whole Tiger death reporting system and allow a more accurate and transparent picture to be generated of the poaching and other threats facing the nation's tiger population. Automatic reminders will be sent to official staff to upload details surrounding any tiger mortalities, including the findings of post mortem examinations. The NTCA recently made funding available for the purchase of cold storage facilities so tiger carcasses can be preserved until a thorough post mortem can be carried out. *Source TRAFFIC.org, 7 January 2010*

Animals Rescued in Texas Arrive at Detroit Zoo -The lives of nearly 27,000 animals seized in a raid on a Texas exotic animal dealer on 15 December are no longer in limbo following a judge's ruling that the animals will not be returned to U.S. Global Exotics. Hundreds of the surviving rescued animals are now at their new home at the Detroit Zoo. The Zoo is providing sanctuary for numerous exotic mammals – including five wallabies, four sloths, three agoutis, two ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) and two coatis (*Nasua narica*) – as well as hundreds of reptiles, spiders and amphibians. In addition, the Zoo is helping to place hundreds more animals in other accredited zoos and sanctuaries throughout the country.

The Detroit Zoo played an important role in the largest exotic animal rescue effort in the history of the United States, providing expert assistance in the care of the confiscated animals. Several Zoo animal curators and supervisors spent the seven weeks since the raid helping to care for the animals, many seriously ill, at a temporary rescue facility in Dallas.

“Our mission is celebrating and saving wildlife. There are times we do a lot of celebrating, but this time we are saving thousands of animals,” said Detroit Zoological Society Executive Director Ron Kagan.

The amphibians will be cared for at the Detroit Zoo's National Amphibian Conservation Center, a leader in amphibian exhibition, conservation and research. The wallabies will join the Zoo's wallabies and red kangaroos (*Macropus rufus*) at the Australian Outback Adventure, and appropriate habitats are being prepared for the other animals. All of the rescued animals will be in quarantine for several weeks to ensure they are healthy and acclimating well before being released into their respective habitats.

Officials with the City of Arlington carried out the raid on U.S. Global Exotics after obtaining evidence gathered during a seven-month undercover investigation by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The Detroit Zoo was contacted for assistance with the care and potential placement of the animals, seized with the help of animal protection groups including PETA, Humane Society of North Texas and the Texas Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). An Arlington municipal judge ruled that the animals were cruelly treated – confined in cramped and filthy cages and denied necessary food, water and veterinary care – and should not be returned to U.S. Global Exotics. The company's owners appealed the decision but were denied by a higher court. The Texas SPCA is working to place the remaining animals with other accredited zoos and sanctuaries to ensure that they are not put back into the pet trade or released into the wild. *Source: Detroit Zoo, 5 February 2010*

In Reversal, Jaguar Habitat Will Be Protected - After more than a decade of resistance, the Fish and Wildlife Service said that it would reverse previous decisions and protect the habitat of the jaguar (*Panthera onca*). The sleek, ferocious cats have been listed since 1997 as endangered, the highest level of peril for a wild species. Still, the government has never designated critical habitat for the jaguar or come up with a formal recovery plan, steps that are commonly taken under the Endangered Species Act. The federal government has given varying reasons for its refusal to act. In 1997, the Fish and Wildlife Service said that to protect the jaguar's habitat, it would have to make public maps of its range. That would make the animals vulnerable to more poaching, already a primary cause of deaths, it said. In 2006, the service argued that jaguars were primarily native to South and Central America and that their range in the United States was largely incidental to its survival. Wildlife advocates sued to protest



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