



"To rescue, release and provide sanctuary with dignity"

June 2, 2008

Dr. Robert Gibbens
Regional Director, Western Region
USDA/APHIS/AC
2150 Centre Ave.
Building B, Mailstop 3W11
Fort Collins, CO 80526-8117

Sent by email to Robert.M.Gibbens@usda.gov

Dr. Gibbens,

On behalf of Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Inc., I am filing a formal complaint on licensed exhibitor:

74-C-0494
San Antonio Zoological Gardens
3903 N. St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, TX 78212

On May 6, 2008 a WRR board member and I visited the San Antonio Zoo. At this date we noted several violations of the AWA regulations and standards at this facility.

Notably:

Section 2.40 - Attending Veterinarian and Adequate Veterinary Care

- Lucky, Asian Elephant, showed signs of foot ailments with dry cracked pads (all feet) and peeling skin around the edges of the pad (right rear foot). The pad on the right rear foot appeared swollen and Lucky favored the right rear foot by raising it on a continual basis. Toenails appeared trimmed but discolored. In the afternoon Lucky's front feet were soaked in buckets while a keeper held her right rear leg up on an adjacent railing/fence. (Pictures included)
- Two Black Rhinoceroses appeared underweight and emaciated with pronounced hips and ribs showing. (pictures included)

Sec. 3.127 Facilities, outdoor.

(a) Shelter from sunlight. When sunlight is likely to cause overheating or discomfort of the animals, sufficient shade by natural or artificial means shall be provided to allow all animals kept outdoors to protect themselves from direct sunlight.

(b) Shelter from inclement weather. Natural or artificial shelter appropriate to the local climatic conditions for the species concerned shall be provided for all animals kept outdoors to afford them protection and to prevent discomfort to such animals. Individual animals shall be acclimated before they are exposed to the extremes of the individual climate.

- Shade was extremely lacking in several exhibits. Shelter was almost universally provided only as indoor sections of the exhibit and was consistently closed off to the animals.
- Lucky had two tall umbrella shaped caps on poles that provided almost no shade and not a large enough area to encompass her entire body.
- The tiger had very little shade in his enclosure and was panting heavily.
- Rhinoceroses had no shade in separated areas of the enclosure and were seen attempting to obtain shade from the side walls of the exhibit; which was not sufficient.
- Many other animals in this facility had relatively little or no shade provided.

(d) Perimeter fence

- Lucky's enclosure is separated from the public with a dry moat which has a short fence on the interior and one on the exterior side. The distance between the enclosure and the public is not sufficient to eliminate public contact if Lucky extends her trunk across the moat.

Sec. 3.128 Space requirements.

Enclosures shall be constructed and maintained so as to provide sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal postural and social adjustments with adequate freedom of movement. Inadequate space may be indicated by evidence of malnutrition, poor condition, debility, stress, or abnormal behavior patterns.

- Lack of sufficient space requirements was evident throughout the facility on an almost universal basis.
- Malnutrition was seen in Rhinoceroses, lethargy was evident in bears and large cats, stereotypical pacing behavior was evident in the tiger, the hyenas, the bushdog and several other species.
- Repetitive stereotypic movement patterns were evidenced from Lucky, Asian Elephant, on several visits to the zoo. In visits on 5/6/08, 5/13 /08, 5/18 /08, 5/24/08, 5/27/08 and 5/30/08 repetitive movement patterns were observed of Lucky moving a few steps forward, a few steps backward, a few steps forward, raising the right front foot, raising the left front foot and then repeating the pattern.

Sec. 3.130 Watering.

If potable water is not accessible to the animals at all times, it must be provided as often as necessary for the health and comfort of the animal. Frequency of watering shall consider age, species, condition, size, and type of the animal. All water receptacles shall be kept clean and sanitary.

- Water was not evidenced in the tiger enclosure and the tiger was panting heavily.
- The only water in Lucky's enclosure was in the small pool. The water was green and appeared to be filthy on each visit. Lucky entered the pool on only one occasion and the water level was only at her knee joints.

Sec. 3.132 Employees.

A sufficient number of adequately trained employees shall be utilized to maintain the professionally acceptable level of husbandry practices set forth in this subpart. Such practices shall be under a supervisor who has a background in animal care.

Sec. 2.131 Handling of animals.

(a) All licensees who maintain wild or exotic animals must demonstrate adequate experience and knowledge of the species they maintain.

- Elephant keepers were not knowledgeable concerning elephant foot problems, the background of the elephant in their care or elephant lifespan in the wild or in captivity. Pad cracks were described as normal, the keeper had no knowledge of where this elephant was transferred or the fact that she was wild

caught. An ankus was visibly apparent beneath and behind Lucky in several pictures from this facility. The facility is protected contact and would have no need for this implement.

- Employees in the enclosure housing zebras and ostriches left a maintenance truck inside the compound with a container of flammable gas in reach of the ostrich. (pictures included)

Sec. 2.131 Handling of animals

e) When climatic conditions present a threat to an animal's health or well-being, appropriate measures must be taken to alleviate the impact of those conditions. An animal may never be subjected to any combination of temperature, humidity, and time that is detrimental to the animal's health or well-being, taking into consideration such factors as the animal's age, species, breed, overall health status, and acclimation.

- All animals were subjected to high temperatures with lack of shade, closed interior areas and no way to alleviate stressful climatic conditions.
- Almost all substrates for animals throughout the zoo were concrete, rock or compacted ground which added to the overall impact of unbearable heated conditions. Temperatures on all visits were in the 90 -98 degree range with humidity varying on each visit.

Conditions at this zoo are substandard in many areas and need to be addressed by Animal Care. All enclosures are old and created for cleaning and not for animal inhabitants' welfare. We also request that USDA/APHIS/AC investigate previous necropsy reports and causes of death for Alport (deceased Nov. 2007) and Ginny (deceased), two previous elephants at this facility. Alport, an African elephant was previously housed with Lucky and died supposedly suddenly from an orthopedic tear, which we assume means an anterior cruciate ligament tear and would have to have developed over a long time period. Ginny, an Asian elephant also died at this facility from an unknown cause. Elephant care at this facility seems to be noticeably lacking due to the deaths of several animals in their care. Both Asian elephants were transferred to San Antonio zoo from Brookfield zoo in Illinois. Lucky had an intermediate stop at the Steele and Tata Elephant ranch in Seagoville, Texas before San Antonio. Both were wild captured at a young age. Alport was captured in 1958 at a young age and transferred directly to the San Antonio zoo.

Lucky, Asian elephant, is housed singly and has not had companionship since the death of Alport in 2007. USDA has under consideration a docket for elephant standards which plans to address this and several other issues. Even taking into consideration the minimum standards set by the AZA for elephants, this zoo is operating outside of current standards for elephants who are adapted to living in a well developed social structure. This issue should be addressed by USDA/APHIS/AC and using studies by all major elephant expert sources, this elephant should be given association with other elephants of

her species and not only human companionship. This added stress factor causes behavioral alterations and compounds the burden of captivity related problems. This problem also exists for several other animals in this facility. Many animals are singly housed.

We request an investigation into these matters and immediate relief for these animals from their current conditions.

(Att. Link to pictures taken at San Antonio Zoo)

<http://cid-e21c159b843d85ed.spaces.live.com/default.aspx>

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donald W. Elroy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "D".

Donald W. Elroy
Advocacy and Education Coordinator
Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation, Inc.
P.O. Box 369
Kendalia, TX 78027
Phone: (830) 336-2725 Ext# 304
Fax: (830) 336-3733
Email: Don@wildlife-rescue.org
Website: <http://www.wildlife-rescue.org>