

ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS & AQUARIUMS

Report Of The Visiting Committee

SPECIAL INSPECTION

THE TOPEKA ZOO

Topeka, Kansas

Date(s) Visited: December 2-4, 2009

VISITING COMMITTEE INSPECTORS

TEAM CHAIR

Gary Geddes, Director of Zoological & Environmental Education, Metro Parks, Tacoma, WA

R. Eric Miller, DVM, Sr. Vice President for Zoological Operations, St. Louis Zoo, MO

Thomas P. Meehan, DVM, Vice President of Veterinary Services, Chicago Zoological Society, Brookfield, IL

Narrative Report
Special Review of Topeka Zoological Park
December 2-4, 2009

Background

At the request of the Topeka, KS City Manager, Mr. Norton Bonaparte, AZA arranged for the following team to visit the facility December 2-4, 2009:

Gary Geddes, Director of Zoological & Environmental Education for Metro Parks Tacoma, WA
Eric Miller, Sr. VP of Zoological Operations for St. Louis Zoo, Missouri
Tom Meehan, VP of Veterinary Services for Chicago Zoological Society, Brookfield, Illinois

Two of three team members had not previously visited the Zoo. In general, the grounds, site, and overall appearance of the Zoo looked good.

The Topeka Zoological Park was granted accreditation in September, 2007. The focus of this special review was limited to:

- A. Animal health, husbandry, and veterinary care
- B. Safety and security
- C. Management and governance
- D. Any standards of accreditation of concern coincidental to our primary purpose(above)

Agenda

Wed. Dec. 2- Travel; shuttle from Kansas City airport by Dennis Taylor of Topeka (audit contact)
Thurs. Dec. 3- Press conference at City Hall; all staff meeting at Zoo; site tour of Zoo; staff interviews; evening review of information
Fri. Dec. 4- Staff interviews most of day from 8:30-6; evening review of information
Sat. Dec. 5- Early shuttle to Kansas City by Dennis Taylor for departures

Staff

The following staff (31) were in attendance on Thursday morning December 3 for our initial briefing about the purpose of the inspection. In addition, at that time we extended an invitation to all staff for interviews: (20, or about 65%, were formally interviewed ; several others responded through e-mail or telephone conversation)..

Mike Coker, Director (33 yrs.)
Merle Miller, General Curator (20 yrs.)
Dennis Maxim, Business Manager (15.5 yrs.)
Terry Gingrich, Projects and Facilities Manager (16 yrs.)
Edwina Ditmore, Supervisor I-Grp.events; concessions (13 yrs.)

Fawn Moser, Animal Care Manager (19.5 yrs.)
Dawn Olson, Elephant Program Supervisor (8 yrs.)
Beckee Niemackl, Zookeeper II (29 yrs.)
Kristyn Hayden-Ortega, Zookeeper II (8.5 yrs.)
Joe(sephine) Hood, Zookeeper II (8.5 yrs.)
Chris Wayner, Zookeeper II/Commissary Spec. (8 yrs.)
Kevin Mollahan, Zookeeper II (8 yrs.)
Scott Gamerl, Zookeeper II (6 yrs.)
Mindy Shute, Zookeeper II –elephants (6 yrs.)
Heather Kellough, Zookeeper II (4 yrs.)
Geoff Sowan , Zookeeper I(2.6 yrs.)
Nathan Martin, Zookeeper I (2.5 yrs.)
Kim Doman, Zookeeper I (1 yr.)
Joseph Munz , Zookeeper I (7 mo.)
Michelle Schroeder, Zookeeper I (5 mo.)
Wrylie Guffey, Zookeeper I (3 mo.)
Rick Knight, Horticulturist (14 yrs.)
Victor Anguicino, Maintenance Worker III (10.5 yrs.)
Richard McNeil, Maintenance Worker II (10 yrs.)
Clinton Thompson Jr., Maintenance Worker II (5 yrs.)
Iaron S. Jones, Custodian (7 mo.)
Stephanie Workman, Asst. Director of Education (3 yrs.)
Mike Burns, Education Specialist (7 yrs.)
Leslie Jordan, Program Assistant (4 yrs.)
Andrew Bayless, Hospital Clinic Pt. time(1.5 yrs.)
Lacey Frost, Hospital Clinic Pt. time (3 mo.)
Dr. Joe Kamer, Consulting Veterinarian

Specific topics of review and observations by the team:

I. 2007 Accreditation Concerns not yet addressed

- A. A formal education program evaluation process was committed to in 2007 but has not been executed.

“Minor concern: Re-establishment of an education evaluation system is needed.”

“Response: Staff will be implementing this evaluation system later this summer/fall. See attachment-draft of new evaluation system.”

- B. A major concern in the 2007 inspection was the provision of behavioral welfare for primates. While fire hose hammocks were installed, climbing structures and resting platforms have not been installed as described below and are two years beyond the written commitment made to the Accreditation Commission. The 2007 granting of accreditation was contingent on correction of this major concern:

“Major Concern: (from 2007)

All off exhibit orangutan and at least two of the gorilla dens (holding areas) need to have platforms/hammocks so the animals can get off of the ground.”

Response: (Mike Coker to AZA, August 9, 2007)

"We have begun installing more hammocks into the holding units. We are working with the City engineer to design a resting platform for the holding units that will be structurally adequate for the gorillas and orangutans and resistant to constant moisture. When designed the shelves will be installed beginning in late 2007 into 2008."

II. Animal health/husbandry/veterinary care

A. Veterinary Services

1. Professional veterinary services are currently being provided by a consulting veterinarian, Dr. Joe Kamer through routine site visits. Two part-time staff are supporting him with animal record keeping and lab work at his direction. On a temporary basis, part-time veterinary coverage appears to be sufficient. However, animal collection numbers and composition warrant a full-time veterinarian and veterinary technician.
2. A 2,700 sq. ft. hospital building was completed in June, 2008 (after the last full inspection in summer, 2007). These animal health support facilities meet or exceed AZA standards and, with appropriate staffing, will enhance animal health services.
3. Specific animal deaths: A USDA visit in September, 2009 reviewed records including specific mortalities from 2006-9. This report identified concerns regarding a number of individual cases. These included a leopard that died with renal failure in 2006, a hippo that died possibly related to overheating of pool water, and several other cases in which USDA was critical of the level of observation and veterinary care. These cases were reviewed by outside consultants from the veterinary program at Kansas State University as well as by our review team. Our team did not find specific examples of veterinary care that did not meet professional standards. There was evidence of the need for improved communication regarding identification of cases and communication between veterinary and management staff. It was also apparent from a review of the records as well as from staff interviews that mechanical issues with the water supply may have contributed to hyperthermia and death of the hippo in 2006. Previous official reports had denied this possibility.

B. Animal management/husbandry

1. Management of the animals takes place through an unconventional structure for a relatively small collection. The General Curator appears to be too isolated from the day to day activities and thus from the capacity to offer the effective support often needed by the zoological department. The Animal Care Supervisor who reports directly to the General Curator has 16 direct reports; a challenge in any profession. The Zoological Department management structure appears to be unbalanced for the demands of progressive collection management.
2. While animal care staff appear dedicated to the needs of the animals under their care and Zoological Department staffing appears to be adequate (FTE's), there is a history of personnel actions that keep staff from functioning well. Transfers appear to be based upon favoritism, not merit. Standardized disciplinary guidelines are not utilized. Seemingly arbitrary discipline or transfers from one work unit to another over the years has created a mix of experience/knowledge levels in staff with the

- same classifications. This is not considered to be a best practice in either general personnel management or zoo management.
3. Staff involvement with new exhibit design appears to be erratic, resulting in inadequate consideration for critical husbandry features on the front end, costly late construction phase changes, and lost opportunities for professional development. The exhibit planning process does not appear to routinely engage keepers in the design of facilities that they ultimately have to use in day to day management of the collection. An end result has been a need for retroactive "fixes" (as in the new cougar exhibit's lounging shelves). Progressive zoos use exhibit planning as a professional development opportunity for staff at all levels and recognize the need for all exhibit users to have input in the design.
 4. The most widely expressed concern was that an aging infrastructure of exhibits continues to be ignored while new exhibits get fast-tracked with mediocre quality. A capital maintenance plan should be in place as well as a master plan for capital development, recognizing that a mix of both is needed.
 5. It is clear that no mechanism exists or is understood by staff through which animal welfare issues can be reported with confidence that they will be addressed. In the view of many employees, a culture of intimidation appears to exist. Many staff expressed concerns that while the Animal Supervisor passes on comments to other managers, the other managers do not consider these comments or take action on them. (2010 Accreditation Standards and Related Policies; 1.5.8 "The institution must develop a clear process for identifying, communicating, and addressing animal welfare concerns within the institution in a timely manner." The standard for reporting animal welfare concerns must be met.
 6. The elephant barn was completed in October, 2007 (a few months after the last inspection). Staff was engaged in the design details of this exhibit, and it appears to be working well and is suited appropriately for 2-4 elephants.

III. Safety and Security

- A. Through written records which were reviewed and interviews conducted on site, we confirmed that employee safety meetings are rarely conducted (None in 2007, 2-3 in 2008, none in 2009). (2010 Accreditation Standards and Related Policies; 11.4 *Risk Management*: "An employee committee should be appointed to implement the risk management plan, identify areas of potential risk, and review previous incidents.....") This standard must be met.
- B. Through written records which were reviewed and interviews conducted on site, we confirmed that animal escape drills (only June 18, 2009 in record), weather/environment, fire, and staff or visitor injury drills (none in file) are rarely conducted. While several actual incidents of animal escape were described in the records, they are not substitutes for formal drills and follow-up analysis.(2010 Accreditation Standards and Related Policies; 11.2 *Emergency Procedures* 11.2.3: "Emergency drills should be conducted at least once annually for each basic type of emergency...to determine if all staff is aware of the emergency as well as to identify potential areas that could cause problems in the handling of an emergency. These drills need to be recorded and evaluated to ensure that procedures are being followed, that staff training is effective and what is learned is used to correct and/or improve the emergency procedures. Records of these drills must be maintained and improvements in the procedures duly noted whenever such are identified.") A spot check by one of our

team tested the weekend lead for emergency response and found the call down list to be outdated and written procedures lacking. This standard must be met.

C. Management practices give rise to specific safety concerns in the zoological collection.

1. Safety infractions (shift door errors, lock errors) that allow unintended animal movements or escapement are not objectively evaluated. Numerous staff reported that zoological staff transfers from one area to another are used as corrective action without other consequences. The lack of objective performance evaluation and concurrent progressive discipline for critical errors fails to improve employees' capabilities and erodes important peer trust.
2. New employees or others transferred into work units have a very short training period (weeks vs. months) prior to being part of a routine, high level of responsibility. Training procedures must reflect the level of responsibility undertaken when caring for potentially dangerous animals and adequate time and training content provided to staff. Personnel management methods do not appear to be in keeping with 'best practices' to bring about top performance of employees.

IV. Management (not previously mentioned)

- A. One of the most troubling issues to staff was that communications from the director and senior staff were not completely true. Making misleading statements to staff and the public is unacceptable and damages the institution both internally and externally.
- B. There is a feeling of fear, intimidation, and lack of trust in management. This perception creates numerous internal problems that must be recognized and managed with enlightened personnel practices.

V. Governance

- A. The Zoo has a long history under City of Topeka governance. Significant financial support is provided for both operational and capital improvements. With professional management in place, the Zoo can prosper under the current model of governance. There is also an opportunity to look objectively at the potential for a public/private partnership commonly seen among accredited institutions.