

Executive Summary

Wild Neighbours: The Safety and Security of Ontario's Wildlife in Captivity Facilities is based on a 2010 review of wild animal enclosure barriers and other recognized safety measures at six Ontario zoos.

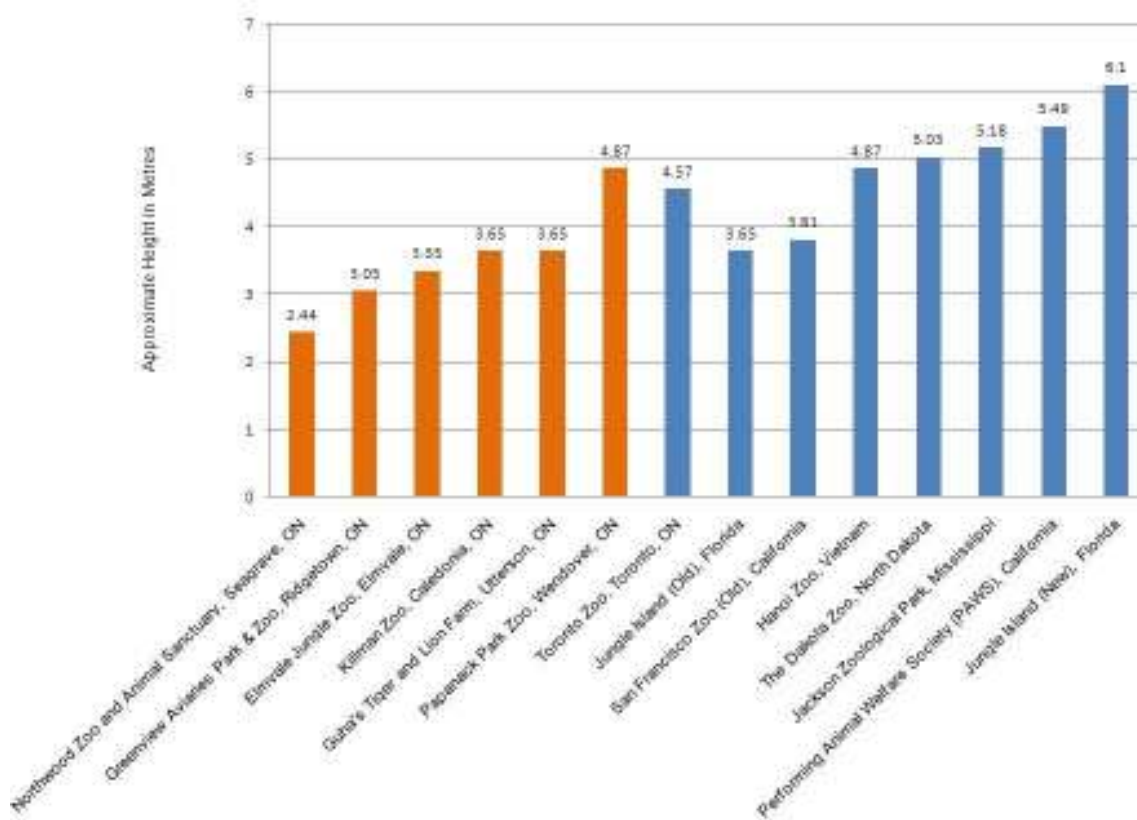
1. Elmvale Jungle Zoo, Elmvale (near Barrie)
2. Greenview Aviaries Park and Zoo, Ridgetown (SE of Chatham)
3. Guha's Tiger and Lion Farm, Utterson (near Bracebridge)
4. Killman Zoo, Caledonia
5. Northwood Zoo and Animal Sanctuary, Seagrave (near Port Perry)
6. Papanack Park Zoo, Wendover (near Ottawa)

Key Findings

1. Enclosure barriers that appear too low to securely contain the species (e.g. tigers and lions) being displayed.

In December 2007, a tiger cleared a 3.81 metre enclosure wall at the San Francisco Zoo and then attacked two men, killing one of them. In September 2009, a tiger cleared a 4.87 metre electrified barrier at the Hanoi Zoo before attacking and killing a keeper. In August 2010, a tiger cleared a 3.65 metre barrier at the Jungle Island Zoo in Florida; no one was injured during that escape.

In Ontario, it is not uncommon to find tigers and other big cats contained by barriers estimated at **4 metres** or less in height.



2. Enclosure materials that appear weak or insufficient to properly contain the animals being displayed.

Potentially dangerous animals were housed behind fence barriers made of light gauge chain link and/or deer fence, portions of fencing were sagging and loose in areas, some fencing did not appear to be secured properly, gaps around fence joints, gates and doors were noted, as were damaged areas of barriers in need of repair.

3. Lack of adequate stand-off barriers to keep visitors back from the animal enclosures.

The report notes cages and enclosures that were not equipped with adequate public stand-off barriers to prevent visitors from contacting the actual animal cages. In several cases, barriers were entirely absent. Some stand-off barrier doors and gates were not properly secured.

4. Unlocked or poorly secured, potentially unsafe gates and entryways.

Some of the gates and entryways were not secured with locks, but with carabiners or wire. Many enclosures had outwardly opening gate or entryways and lacked double-door entry systems (an access system where one door is opened, entered and then closed prior to the second door into the actual enclosure being opened) to prevent escape due to keeper error.

5. Lack of appropriate perimeter fencing around facilities to discourage escaped animals from leaving the property.

Escapes, Attacks and Maulings

A little more than one year ago, Norman Buwalda, a resident of Southwold, Ontario was fatally mauled by his pet tiger. The anniversary of his death should serve as a reminder that more needs to be done to address the public safety issues associated with wild animal ownership.

For several years the residents of Southwold asked their town council to pass a strong and effective by-law to control the keeping of dangerous exotic animals. When a tiger on the same property attacked a 10-year-old boy in 2004, the local council finally acceded but Mr. Buwalda fought the new by-law and won.

Exotic wild animals can pose a serious physical threat when they escape or come into close contact with people and can be vectors of zoonotic diseases. There have been about 50 incidents reported since 1985 of captive wildlife - including tigers, lions, jaguars, bobcats, bears and wolves - escaping from zoos or private properties or attacking people. For more information on some of these incidents see page 48 of the full report.

Ontario Regulations

Ontario is the *only* province that does not licence the keeping of exotic animals or conduct public safety inspections to ensure the animals are securely contained.

Ontario residents can keep a tiger, lion or venomous snake in their backyard or home, without a licence or any professional training – provided their municipality doesn't have a specific bylaw prohibiting that particular species.

As a result, there are more roadside zoos¹ and private wildlife collectors here than in any other province. In addition to more than 50 zoos, there are thousands of private animal owners, including many that are housing

¹ Roadside zoos are small, substandard facilities that lack trained professional animal care staff and the financial resources necessary to ensure the humane and safe keeping of the animals.

potentially dangerous animals. Evidence suggests that in many cases, these animals are kept with little regard to animal welfare or public safety.

Since there is no provincial licence requirement, there is no official tally as to how many exotic animals are kept in Ontario or where they are located. It has been estimated that there could be as many as 500 exotic cats (e.g. lions, tigers, jaguars and servals) kept in private hands in the province. The lack of information about where these potentially dangerous animals are housed presents a serious safety concern.

Solution: Ontario's Minister of Natural Resources must pass regulations

The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and Zoocheck Canada are urging Minister Linda Jeffrey to pass regulations to licence the keeping of exotic wild animals and establish a comprehensive application process to acquire and maintain this licence. This is essential to prevent the proliferation of new roadside zoos and to ensure that unqualified people do not acquire wild animals as pets.

The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) already licences the keeping of native wildlife (e.g. raccoons and wolves) which represent approximately 1/3 of all animals in Ontario zoos. Applicants do not need professional training or any other prerequisites to obtain a licence to keep native species.

In other provinces, applicants are required to submit a business plan, proof of training and expertise to care for the species they intend to possess, proof of liability insurance, and an emergency plan in the case of an escape, an accident or the zoo's unforeseen closure.

As a result, the animal owner assumes more responsibility to prevent and address animal welfare and public safety problems, and the provincial government can ensure that the regime is implemented equally across the province.

In November 2010, Dave Levac (MPP-Brant) introduced Bill 125 – *the Exotic Wildlife in Captivity Act*. If passed, it would give the MNR the ability to licence the keeping of exotic animals and to establish mandatory requirements of the licensee. A legal opinion obtained by WSPA indicates the Minister already has the mandate and authority to licence the keeping of exotic animals through regulations under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*.