



ANIMAL CONCERN NEWS

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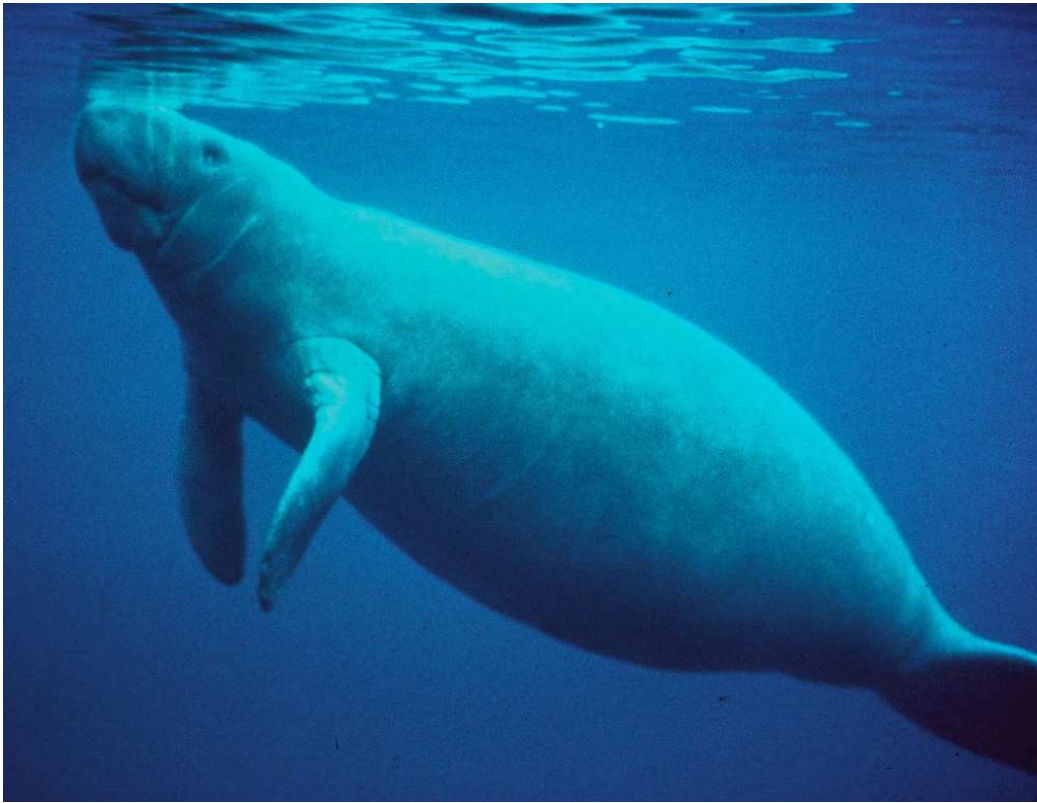
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IT'S ZOO ILLOGICAL



Are manatees going to be imprisoned in Glasgow to create yet another commercial visitor "attraction"?

A manatee surfaces for air.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Two years ago, after many years of campaigning by Animal Concern, the debt-ridden decaying slum that was Glasgow Zoo finally closed its rusty gates. Several of the remaining animals had to be put down including some very elderly and infirm bears we had saved from the Balloch Bear Park when it closed down over a decade ago.

For years we urged Glasgow Zoo to show the way forward. We asked that instead of trying to maintain the out of date, unpopular concept of an animal attraction they instead provide something which is greatly needed - a true sanctuary for animals. Too often animals rescued from the exotic pet trade or retired and abandoned by closing zoos, circuses and animal laboratories are simply destroyed as though they were inanimate garbage.

Glasgow Zoo has been allowed to sell part of their 90 acres of green-belt land to a house builder. It is thought the rest of the zoo site will go the same way. Not only will the zoo be able to pay back the £5 million they owe the bank, they will have a few million left over. Are they going to use that money to help and protect animals which need assistance? No - in conjunction with Edinburgh Zoo they want to build an "Amazonian Rainforest Experience" at Cunnigar Loop on the banks of the Clyde. In the east end of the city the Loop is an old industrial site which has been reclaimed by nature and is home to a vast amount of wildlife including over 100 species of birds.

Between them the folk from Glasgow and Edinburgh Zoos want to raise £35 million (from lottery and other sources) to put an artificial four acre tidal rainforest under a plastic canopy. Scottish Enterprise and The Clyde Gateway project are also involved in this project.

Among the intended animal victims of this monstrosity are manatee, tapir, jaguar, macaw and squirrel monkey. Few European zoos keep manatee as they are difficult to keep. At one end they consume vast amounts of expensive vegetable matter and at the other end they produce vast amounts of excrement for which you need costly filtration and disposal equipment to keep their aquarium fresh. The water has to be kept at 28c, not easy when it can be -8c outside the plastic bubble.

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In the last few years of Glasgow Zoo unpaid staff went around scrounging food scraps from shops to feed the animals. On one occasion one of our supporters came across a zoo volunteer begging for her bus fare at Buchanan Street in Glasgow so she could take food out to feed the animals. Brother and sister lions were allowed to breed and other lions died in a mysterious poisoning incident. Snakes and other creatures went missing and local children had free access to the place at night.

The Highland Wildlife Park near Aviemore is run by Edinburgh Zoo. It is not that long since we had to campaign to have an old bear moved from there to more suitable accommodation at Edinburgh.

Edinburgh Zoo also has a poor record in some respects. Their polar bear Mercedes gave birth to nice fluffy cubs which drew in punters at the beginning of the season. I believe two were sent to Japan where notorious bear parks are a big draw with the public. Another, Minty, was sponsored by a sweet manufacturer and brought in loads of cash and thousands of visitors. When he outgrew the cute fluffy stage he was quietly packed off to Antwerp Zoo. Following a tip-off I went over to Antwerp and filmed "Mad Minty" pacing and head-swinging in his Victorian concrete enclosure. He died within a year.

When Mercedes' mate Barney choked to death on a plastic toy thrown to him by a visitor, Edinburgh Zoo promised not to replace him. In the last few months they have gone back on their word and announced they are seeking a new male bear to restart their breeding programme.

Scottish Enterprise are pumping £3.5 million of public money into the Balloch fish tank - a commercial aquarium built on the once bonnie banks of Loch Lomond to house local flora and fauna. That's if you count clown fish, tropical sharks, sturgeon and Asiatic otters as local.

Can we entrust difficult to keep animals to institutions with such a bad track record? If there is any cash to spare I suggest they use it to neuter the animals they have and to give those animals as near to natural habitat as they can. As the collection naturally dies out they could use the space to provide sanctuary for animals with nowhere else to go. That would receive support from the public and organisations dedicated to protecting animals.

My hopes for such a project were dashed when I was asked to take part in a for-and-against editorial in the Evening Times newspaper. David Windmill, Chief Executive of Edinburgh Zoo, wrote the "For" piece. Some of the things he said about this four acres on the banks of the Clyde included:

"It will be an escape into another world that the average Scottish family could never afford without crossing the Atlantic; a journey of discovery into one of our planet's most diverse and mysterious ecosystems, the Amazonian flooded forest."

"The development will contribute to the Scottish Executive's 'public engagement of science' agenda."

"It will provide a significant contribution to Glasgow tourism, and add to the regeneration of the east end of the city."

"The 'wild' is disappearing fast. It is time to engage people, to get their attention and encourage them to support the natural world that could soon disappear forever."

If feeling the breeze as a scarlet macaw flies past their face helps; or experiencing the excitement of a jaguar jumping out the undergrowth helps; or laughing at a squirrel monkey swinging about the forest canopy helps ... then we have to do it!"

I'm afraid that a zoo director who writes as though he has escaped from the PR Department at Euro Disney is unlikely to listen to the unglossy, down to earth proposal we are putting forward. However this will not deter us from opposing this latest exploitation of animals in Scotland. We have two to three years to put a stop to it. Please help us by sending polite letters of protest to:

Councillor George Redmond, Chairman of Glasgow Gateway, C/o Glasgow City Council, Council Chambers, George Square, Glasgow G1. E-mail: george.redmond@councillors.glasgow.gov.uk

Sir John Ward CBE, Chairman, Scottish Enterprise, 5 Atlantic Quay, 150 Broomielaw, Glasgow G2 8LU. E-mail: info@rzss.org.uk

The Board of Trustees, The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Corstorphine, Edinburgh EH12 6TS. E-mail: info@rzss.org.uk

It's Zoo Illogical 2

In August Animal Concern was informed by a member of staff at West Dunbartonshire Council that we would be invited to attend a special meeting of the Licensing Board on 21st September. The meeting was to deal with the application for a Zoo License for Drumkinnon Tower at Balloch.

I changed my itinerary to allow me to attend the Meeting on 21st September only to find out from a third party that the meeting had been cancelled. My invitation to attend the reconvened Meeting on 28th September was not received until 11th October.

Central to the Meeting was a Report by the Director of Development and Environmental Services which neglected to mention an important fact. It failed to state that comments submitted by the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority included the statement that: “..... tests within Section 1A of the (Zoo Licensing) Act are not met.”

Another thing which was not mentioned at the Meeting was that one of the three Councillors present, Connie O’Sullivan, sits on the Board of Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire who lease Drumkinnon Tower to Merlin Entertainments and have a vested interest in seeing Merlin obtain the Zoo License. Scottish Enterprise Dunbartonshire are spending £3.5million of public money turning Drumkinnon Tower into an aquatic Zoo.

So, despite being told by the National Parks Authority that the application did not meet the requirements of the Zoo Licensing Act and despite one of the three Councillors failing to declare an interest in the matter, Merlin were given their Zoo License and have started converting Drumkinnon Tower into a prison for Asiatic otters and an assortment of tropical fish.

Animal Concern has lodged a complaint with the Chief Investigating Officer for Ethical Standards in Public Life and the conduct of Councillor O’Sullivan is currently under investigation.



Animal Concern was there to witness the flag coming down on Drumkinnon Tower for the last time. When it goes up again in June 2006 it will be on a prison for animals. It already looks the part.

The Scottish Animal Rights Alliance (SARA) now have new contact details. If you are in a local group or would like to start a local group please contact them:

SCOTTISH ANIMAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE
PO BOX 1929, LIVINGSTON, EH54 6XZ
E-mail: scotland@animalrightsalliance.org.uk
Website: <http://www.animalrightsalliance.org.uk>
Telephone: 08454 082385

We have had reports of yet another mass slaughter of seals at a fish farm on the West Coast. Two consultations on fish farming are currently ongoing at the Scottish Parliament. We will be lobbying to have extra protection given to seals. Please write to your MSP asking that the Conservation of Seals Act 1970 be replaced by legislation which actually protects seals and that fish farmers be required by law to fit and maintain properly tensioned anti-predator nets to humanely deter seals.

Animal Concern really does need some new supporters. If you are not a member or if you know someone who might be interested in joining please contact us (details at the head of this newsletter).

In 2006 we will have been campaigning for 130 years. Sadly our work is still very much needed and we need your support if that work is to continue.

This newsletter can only carry information about a little of what we do. If you are on the Internet why not visit our website or send us your e-mail address to find out more about what we do.

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RANTING ROBINS



Did you ever have one of those Uncles who, on your birthday or at Xmas, would hold out a nice new half-crown in one hand and a tatty, disgusting ten bob note in the other and then ask you if you would rather have the big shiny silver penny or the dirty old bit of screwed up paper?

I did and, with a mile wide smile on my face, I took the big silver penny. Suddenly everyone in the room was laughing at me and my face crumpled like that old ten shilling note. Mind you I was twenty-two at the time and should have known better!

My Uncle is long dead but his spirit lives on in the Palace of Westminster and the concrete pigeon coop in Holyrood where sits the Scottish Parliament.

Our politicians are hyping new legislation as though it has been engraved onto ingots of platinum when it is scribbled on the foil from an old fag packet.

For two years we sent in suggestions and went to meetings with the Scottish Executive to help carve out new animal welfare laws for Scotland. When the new draft legislation finally arrived it had been amalgamated with other proposals on animal health.

We had hoped the proposed new laws would ban obvious cruelty like coupling horses, animal circuses, puppy farms and several other indefensible practises. We also hoped for stricter controls to protect farm animals by introducing licenses for livestock keepers. Similar licenses were proposed for animal sanctuaries following several hellish cases where sanctuaries turned out to be anything but places of safety for animals.

The proposed new law has two definite proposals. One bans giving goldfish as prizes and the other gives the Executive powers to order the destruction of millions of animals to stop disease epidemics. No exemption is given for pet or sanctuary animals which could be quarantined and vaccinated and are not intended for the food chain anyway.

The law, we are told, would also "enable" other improvements to be introduced over time. These

might include the bans and licensing we sought. I simply do not like this approach to legislation.

If MPs and MSPs agree it is wrong to drag animals around the country, making them perform stupid tricks for stupid people, they should have the guts to ban animal act circuses.

It is wrong to nail misshapen shoes onto horses hooves to force the creatures to waddle like Charlie Chaplin simply because twisted horse judges like that stance. The law should ban it.

How many more weak, sickly dogs are to be bred in old piggeries and sold to mugs for hundreds of pounds before our politicians ban puppy farming?

To curb farm cruelty we should license livestock farmers and insist all intensive units be covered by CCTV cameras linked to local authority animal welfare offices. That would be good for animals and, by weeding out cruel farmers, good for the better ones. It has to be done by legislation.

Politicians know they have power. They have the power to build themselves a £440 million pound work place and give themselves very competitive salaries and generous expense accounts. They also have the power to make this country a better place for people and animals.

Sadly there seems to be more PR and spin than common sense in the corridors of power. MSPs and MPs want to be all things to all people. They are afraid of upsetting circus owners and farmers by doing the right thing.

Just a few weeks ago the Home Secretary proved he not only does not care much for animal welfare he doesn't think much of human welfare either.

In March, after two year old Andrew Morton had been shot dead by a 27 year-old-man armed with an air rifle, the First Minister promised prompt and far reaching action then remembered the Scottish Parliament has no control over airguns. What did Westminster do? They passed a law requiring shops that sell airguns to be licensed.

As I write hundreds of thousands of airguns are in circulation in this country and hundreds more are being wrapped up in brightly coloured wrapping paper. In the next year one or two people, probably children, will be killed by airguns. About a dozen people will lose an eye to an airgun pellet. Public and private property will be smashed by airgun pellets. Tens of thousands of wild, farm and pet animals and birds will be killed or injured by airguns.

Who should we blame? The thugs with the guns or the politicians who arm them?