Special Report on Zoo Reform
The Humane Society of the United States

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HSUS has succeeded in bringing the plight of zoo animals to the attention of all Americans.

The Humane Society of the United States has taken the lead for the past 3½ years in reforming American zoos. HSUS has awakened Americans to the fact that wild animals have been caged inhumanely for many decades in the nation's zoos and that major and drastic actions are necessary to correct these problems.

While HSUS has continued to insist that no wild animal should be exploited simply to create an attraction or exhibit, such is not the state of the world as it exists today. Consequently, HSUS is determined to do everything in its power to alleviate the suffering of wild animals now in confinement.

When HSUS launched a nationwide investigation of zoos in the summer of 1971, many Americans thought of zoos as nothing more than sources of entertainment. As a result, animals were living in cramped, unimaginative surroundings that gave them little or no chance to demonstrate their natural lifestyles and often turned them into neurotic creatures with little similarity to their relatives in the wild.

After visiting 120 zoos during the first 12 months of the investigation, HSUS zoo investigator Sue Press-
man concluded that many of the zoos were “nothing more than ghettos for animals.” Most zoos were so confused about their animals, one or two examples of every species possible that they failed to provide adequate quarters for the animals they already had. Ample conditions—she found a hippopotamus confined to the cage without exercise or sunlight and out of public view for 7 years. As a result of the HSUS investigation, the animals have now been moved to the outdoor exhibit pictured on the next page.

Several zoos and officials of the HSUS officials have spread the word loud and clear that unless citizens of the community involve themselves in obtaining changes necessary to make their zoo humane, it is going to be closed. One of the toughest aspects of the zoo reform campaign has been the effort to convince municipal officials to move the zoo to a higher priority when they are considering programming and funding. As one local zoo employee complained, “Zoos begin with a Z, the end of the alphabet, and that’s attention it requires. While it had been widely assumed that ride-through zoos would be an improvement over traditional zoos, it hasn’t turned out that way. Because very few non-profit zoos can afford the land necessary for such ventures, ride-through zoos are developed and operated like any other commercial enterprise; animal welfare, conservation, and education become secondary to making money. Wild animals add “one more element, just like another ride,” an official of the company was quoted as saying. Warner Brothers, ABC Paramount and Maxwell’s Plum, a famous New York City restaurant, all open at least one ride-through zoo.

The orangutans that had been confined to a tiny, dark cage for 7 years at the Los Angeles Zoo were moved to this outdoor exhibit as a result of the HSUS’s severe criticism of the inhumane quarters. A larger exhibit that will give the animals even more freedom is under construction.

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drastic steps to change inhumane conditions at their zoos they can be personally charged with cruelty to animals.

Consequently, zoos are now in a better position than ever before to provide proper care and conditions for their animals. In Los Angeles, for example, the Recreation and Parks Commission allocated $450,000 to 18 emergency projects for the zoo shortly after HSUS investigators criticized the 8-year-old zoo for its 50-year-old ideas. Roger Caras, an HSUS vice president, was commissioned by New York City to conduct a study of the New York City zoos after severe criticism of the zoos by HSUS and other organizations.

Nevertheless, the amount of money needed to transform major zoos into humanely housed, large enclosures is enormous. A plan to update Boston’s Franklin Park Zoo has a price tag of $27 million. The new World of Birds building erected by the New York Zoological Society cost $4 million, and the Minnesota State Zoo is spending $2.5 million for a northern animal exhibit.

“If every community in the United States with a zoo must make a decision before this year is out as to whether it is going to make its zoo a totally humane facility or close it,” declared HSUS President John A. Hoyt, “Let’s stop permitting man to exploit wild animals!”

In addition to working with zoos to make them humane, HSUS has placed emphasis on making zoos the source of positive learning experiences. It is important, HSUS believes, that people receive more than entertainment from zoos; each visit should increase their knowledge about every species they view.

Several zoos are undertaking programs to breed species that are becoming extinct in the wild. HSUS believes that, while this is a valid objective, there are few zoos that can give propagation of nearly extinct species the serious scientific attention it requires.
Investment shares in Lion Country Safari are available in over-the-counter stock. With an adult giraffe now selling for $15,000 in the zoo trade, respect for life easily becomes merely respect for a money making commodity.

But, only two to three years after their popular beginnings, ride-through zoos are in trouble. Even the better facilities have failed to reach anticipated levels of attendance. The energy crisis, which changed the weekend travel habits of Americans, has been a major factor. The steep admission prices, as high as $20.00 for an average size family, has been another one. But equally as significant, the zoological profession believes, is the absence of the sociability element that makes city zoos a popular gathering place for urban residents. When you're restricted to a car or a monorail train, there is no opportunity to talk with other visitors or to develop a feeling of familiarity with the animals. For all of these reasons combined, the ride-through zoo seems to fall in the same category as Niagara Falls: everyone wants to see it, but once is enough.

HSUS is particularly concerned about the proliferation of ride-through parks within driving distance of the same urban areas. Two parks are operated in the small state of New Jersey, while two others are within a short distance of Washington, D.C. What happens to the animals if any of these zoos fails to realize anticipated profits? One ride-through park has already gone bankrupt after a second park opened within a few miles of it outside Dallas. Many of the animals remained in the park for a year after it closed, with only a caretaker staff to attend to their very special needs.

HSUS has also directed its attention to stopping the exploitation of animals as attractions for business enterprises. In 1971 protests from hundreds of HSUS members succeeded in getting Tuffy the Bengal tiger released from a glass cage behind a bar in a White Plains, N.Y., health club and relocating him in a natural habitat zoo in Texas. Since then HSUS has been responsible for relocating bears from a roadside bar and grill in South Carolina, an Ohio riding stable, and an auction house in Florida to natural habitat surroundings.

Through investigations, educational programs, and nationwide publicity, HSUS has succeeded in bringing the plight of zoo animals to the attention of all Americans. As a result, flagrant cruelties to wild animals in confinement have been considerably reduced. But the work is far from finished.

To make further progress in zoo reform, HSUS and other animal welfare organizations need national standards for the housing, health, and care of animals in confinement. The Animal Welfare Act of 1970 provided some help by requiring that all animal exhibits be licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), but it fell far short by leaving too much discretion to the USDA veterinarians who have responsibility for interpreting the law.

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Inspecting farm animals can’t be expected to understand the needs of animals within the confines of a zoo," Mrs. Pressman said. HSUS also believes that the standards should be high enough to provide enrichment for the animals, rather than the minimum health and welfare that the Animal Welfare Act provided.

By 1974 the waves begun by the HSUS zoo investigations had reached Capitol Hill, where several lawmakers realized that stronger federal legislation was needed to change the nation’s zoos. Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.) and Reps. William Whitehurst (R-Va.) and John Dingell (D-Mich.) introduced legislation with various approaches for achieving this objective. Each of these bills, however, had serious flaws. The best aspects of all three bills have now been put together in a single bill that Representative Dingell has introduced in the new Congress. At his request, HSUS officials have shared their findings about zoo needs and made recommendations for remedial programs. The new bill incorporates many of those recommendations.

The nucleus of the legislation would be a requirement that all facilities that keep exotic animals be licensed, whether the animals are being displayed to the public or not. It would cover all types of zoos, municipal or private (including roadside zoos), urban or ride-through, aquariums, circuses, humane societies that maintain wildlife for any purpose, nature centers, and trail museums. A Certification Board would be created to establish specific requirements for the housing and care of each species in every type of facility. The board would be comprised of representatives of national animal welfare organizations, zoo professionals, and government officials.

Zoos that cannot meet these requirements will be closed. If the legislation is enacted, the number of zoos in this country may be reduced to a small portion of the total number today. That is how it should be, HSUS believes—only zoos that can do an effective job should be permitted to continue operation.

Hardest hit will be the roadside menageries, which HSUS and other animal welfare organizations have opposed for many years. Most of these animal exploitation operations will be put out of business.

The board would also have authority to award grants for the construction of new facilities and advance study by zoo professionals that will improve the concept and operations of the zoo. At HSUS’s insistence, the legislation stipulates that no funds may be granted unless the studies are related solely to the welfare of animals, that studies must be conducted humanely, and that none of the projects can interfere with the health or welfare of the animals.

"HSUS has carried the burden of zoo reform for the past 3½ years," Hoyt declared. "The responsibility should now be shifted to the federal government.

HSUS will continue, however, to investigate reports of cruelty in zoos and provide whatever help is necessary to make new federal requirements work, he said. Unfortunately, the zoo profession has decided to fight this legislation out of fear that the new standards will be too difficult for them to attain. The American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums has hired the same lobbyist who represented the tuna industry in its effort to thwart passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

The Dingell bill is now pending before the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife Conservation and the Environment of the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Robert L. Leggett (D-Calif.) chairman.

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“Every community must make a decision before this year is out to make its zoo a totally humane facility or close it.”

Fourteen lions were living in a 20 x 84-foot enclosure when HSUS investigators discovered them at a roadside zoo in Tennessee. HSUS succeeded in having the zoo permanently closed and coordinated the removal of all animals to humane facilities.