

Follow-up on Two Florida Zoos: One Good—One Bad

On a return trip to two major animal exhibitions that she had found badly in need of improvements 4 and 5 years ago, HSUS zoo expert Sue Pressman discovered that one of them had implemented all of her recommendations and the other was continuing a mediocre operation with little change.

At Lion Country Safari in West Palm Beach, Fla., Mrs. Pressman found that discrepancies she noted in a 1972 investigation had been corrected to the letter. But at Dade County's Crandon Park Zoo in Miami she found that the same personnel problems that plagued the zoo in 1971 were still in evidence.

Mrs. Pressman's earlier investigation of Lion Country Safari had received major attention from the Florida press and prompted General Manager Richard Huhn to put HSUS down as "just one of many organizations concerned with animal welfare. If we listened to everyone that thinks they're an animal expert, we wouldn't be able to operate,"

Huhn was quoted as telling the Palm Beach Times. He made it clear that he had no intention of implementing all Mrs. Pressman's recommendations.

But Huhn is no longer with Lion Country Safari, and his successor, William F. Haythorn, apparently recognized the validity of Mrs. Pressman's criticism. In 1972 Mrs. Pressman found several lions crowded into 28 x 30-foot cages for the night, no separate facilities for sick, injured, or isolated animals, and inadequate sanitation facilities. Today, the park has new cages 3 times as large to house a smaller inventory of lions. Each cage has running water and drains for easy cleaning and a new hospital, nursery, and isolation ward have been constructed.

On her earlier visit, Mrs. Pressman called for a full-time veterinarian instead of merely a part-time one. The park went even further, however, by hiring a full-time veterinarian and keeping the part-time one as well.

Four years ago Mrs. Pressman was shocked to find the animals had only polluted water from a canal for drinking. Today, pipes have been installed to bring sanitary drinking water to all animals. She also found that the staff structure has been revised to upgrade all positions in the park.

"I think this park deserves a pat on the back," she said after completing her inspection. "It took a long time to get these improvements, but the important thing is they've been made. That isn't to say that everything is perfect, but the park is well on its way to meeting all HSUS standards."

Mrs. Pressman was particularly impressed that the park had undertaken major expenditures for improvements at a time when almost all drive-through zoos are experiencing serious financial problems, owing to a drop in popularity among the public.

"This is a critical period for all drive-through parks, and HSUS intends to watch them very closely to make sure animals don't suffer the consequences," she said. "The concern we voiced a few years ago about the proliferation of these parks is now proving to be all too valid."

The Crandon Park Zoo, on the other hand, has shown such a total lack of improvement that the HSUS Legal Department is considering taking action to force Dade County to make drastic changes.

"I have never seen such falling-down, ramshackle displays anywhere," Mrs. Pressman said. "The children's zoo is undoubtedly one of the most depressing exhibitions I've seen."

She was shocked to find that a very rare echidna, one of two egg-laying mammals in existence (the other being the platypus) is still living in the packing box out of public view where she found him 5 years ago. Two other echidnas owned by the zoo have died.

She encountered poor attitudes and ignorance in several zoo keepers and was cornered by several of them to listen to horror stories of the treatment of animals.

"The citizens of Dade County had better make a decision right now as to whether they want to have a good zoo or none at all," Mrs. Pressman said. "As far as HSUS is concerned, there are no alternatives in between."



Photo by James M. Rogers, Lion Country Safari