

REGULATING WILDLIFE EXHIBITORS, IMPORTERS AND EXPORTERS

By
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Inspector

Man has kept wild animals in captivity for thousands of years. He did it by necessity in the beginning to help in the hunt or, when the growl of an empty stomach outweighed the animal's advantage of hunting prowess, to place in the pot. "Civilized man," usually with a full stomach and leisure time, gradually developed a view of the animal kingdom from a perspective other than skewered over an open fire. He became fascinated by the unusual, awed by the brute strength, and amazed at the diversity of the world's fauna.

These shifts in man's attitude toward wildlife, as well as the old world collections of scientific menageries, spawned an increasing interest in zoological parks. This familiarity with unusual animals from all over the world has helped generate today's booming pet trade - a worldwide commerce in exotic animals.

Men still exhibit animals for show and profit, but affluent man also likes to own exotic fish, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. He often equates admiration of a specimen with possession, possession with dominance, dominance with status, and, thus, the enjoyment of owning a beast, whether for pleasure or profit, or both, is supposedly enhanced.

The by-products of this trend have created three complex enforcement dilemmas - the regulation of wildlife exhibits, the control of imported animals, and the control of exported wildlife, particularly unique native species. These problems have periodically plagued every state and the intent of this presentation is to define the major problems and to present a program for effectively coping with them.

Before discussing procedures or techniques, it is imperative that we examine the most important facet of the program - specialization of personnel. The key to the success of any program in this area is the establishment of a specialized inspection unit. The concept is to blend personnel having a biological background with the wildlife officer's enforcement expertise. The product will eliminate the need for both a biologist and a wildlife officer for routine inspections and will produce a well-informed specialized inspector. The inspector's sole responsibility would be to monitor and enforce the multitude of regulations affecting exhibition, possession, transportation, importation, and exportation of wildlife.

Requirements for such a position should be necessarily high. A four-year degree in the biological sciences or several years of comparable experience are realistic qualifications. An inspector must be familiar with the identification of animals from all over the world; must be acquainted with basic philosophies and theories regarding exhibition of wildlife; and must be apprized of various behavioral characteristics and locomotor patterns of the diverse groups of animals with which he must work.

The Inspector's required knowledge of the animal kingdom cannot be overemphasized. The first time he calls a gavia a crocodile, questions the odor of a ferret's cage, or asks why the baboon's rump is so red and swollen, he has begun to lose the confidence of the person whose facility is being inspected. The best way to gain the respect of the exhibitors fraternity is to know their animals, know their problems, and know how to be fair, but firm.

The size of the inspection unit needed obviously depends upon the magnitude of a state's respective problems. However, the structure of every unit must fulfill certain basic criteria in order to function properly. The unit should operate as a statewide project administered by an Inspections supervisor who works directly

with the chief of law enforcement. The inspection supervisor should be in a position to evaluate all permit applications, respond to complaint correspondence, disseminate pertinent information, act as liaison between the Commission and other organizations, and coordinate the activities of the inspectors. Inspectors in turn are responsible for conducting field inspections, filing inspection reports and developing local relations. This operating policy should solve one of the largest single problems that could develop; that of consistent decision making.

The inspection unit is designed to operate as a specialized support function to the wildlife officers. In recent years, the wildlife officer's responsibilities have increased to the point that he is expected to be, not only a police officer, but also a biologist, an aquatic weed expert, and a public speaker to mention only a few. At least a portion of this increasing burden will be lessened by an Inspection Unit.

The actual regulation of wildlife exhibits centers primarily around insuring humane treatment and sanitary surroundings for all captive wildlife. The basis for achieving this goal obviously hinges on well-structured statutory authority that is strong enough to illicit a response from exhibitors. The inclusion of a confiscation clause, which calls for the seizure of animals that are improperly cared for, has been most effective in "gaining the attention" of recurrent violators. The statute should also require all wildlife distributors and exhibitors to purchase an annual operating permit or license.

The establishment of fair guidelines for the humane treatment of captive wildlife involves some nebulous and controversial decisions. How large a cage is needed for a timber wolf? Which animals need den areas for seclusion? What water temperature is ideal for a polar bear? The answer to these, as well as hundreds of other questions, can be obtained by creating a knowledgeable Wildlife criteria committee. This panel should be composed of experts in the various fields of wildlife exhibiting, as well as representatives from the health department and the respective wildlife agency. Discussions concerning the needs of various groups of animals and the legal application of the procedure should produce compromising criteria. The resulting guidelines will draw credence from the years of experience represented by the committee. As an advisory council, they can continually function as an expert panel.

The Florida Wildlife Criteria Committee, after three years of research and determined work, compiled the first list of minimum pen specifications for almost every conceivable exhibit animal. By grouping animals according to sizes, locomotor patterns, behavioral characteristics and special adaptations, they were able to design requirements that catered to the captive animal's physical and psychological needs. After adoption of these pen specifications, the exhibitors were given a six-month grace period in which to comply. The results were astounding. Many exhibits exceeded the minimum requirements and some exhibitors replaced as much as fifty percent (50%) of their cages. The success of this endeavor was further amplified by the response voiced by a concerned citizenry. Complaint letters were reduced significantly and correspondence recognizing our efforts markedly increased.

Inspection of a facility should involve a comprehensive investigation of general sanitation, health conditions, safety and cage requirements. A detailed check-list is vitally important in conducting an inspection. This checklist not only covers general categories such as appearance, but also reveals specific cage or safety deficiencies. All inadequacies must be noted in the discrepancy report that is submitted following every inspection. By following these established guidelines, a realistic interpretation of recurring weak areas are pinpointed and special emphasis is placed on correcting these problems.

Explaining any corrective measures to the owner of the wildlife is undoubtedly the most difficult segment of the operation. The man is directly, or indirectly, being accused of abusing animals that cannot fend for themselves.

Whether it be guilt, embarrassment, fear of public chastisement or simple professional pride, he will probably become emotionally defensive. In the early stages of the program, the enforcement officers approach to this situation must be different than his approach to a suspected poacher. To be effective, an inspector must solicit cooperation before he demands it.

Rather than explaining a deficiency by saying "the condition of this cage is deplorable — change it!" So much more is usually gained by reversing the approach. Perhaps something like, "I can see that you have tried to provide good conditions for this animal, but don't you think a change here and there will provide better conditions that will enhance the appearance of your exhibit?"

Nine times out of ten, extending a man this courtesy and offering a substitute plan will not only result in the required change, but will also create a cooperative environment. You have not only regulated him - you have helped him.

As I mentioned in the introduction, man not only enjoys visiting well-displayed zoos and exhibits, but for some reason he derives a special enjoyment from owning unusual pets. The increasing demand for exotic pets creates the second topic for discussion — the importation of wildlife.

Florida has become the major port of entry in the United States for foreign animals. There are currently more than one thousand exhibitors, retail and wholesale tropical fish dealers and importer/exporters in Florida responsible for the importation of more than thirty-five (35) million foreign animals and fish annually. These animals and fish are then distributed to almost every state in the Union.

Perhaps more alarming than the volume of foreign species imported is the primary target for this wildlife - the pet trade.

Today's "thing" seems to be the ownership of a wild animal and, in some circles, the more exotic and dangerous the animal, the better. Whether the reason for this sudden outburst be an "atavistic throwback," an "attention getter" or an "everyone else has one," if not controlled, the repercussions will certainly be severe. Everything from scorpions to tigers, venomous snakes to wolves and piranha to freshwater stingrays have entered the pet trade market. As long as these pets remain in captivity, the only detrimental effect, if any, is to the animal itself. Once it has escaped or been released, the serious problems begin.

The disastrous results prompted by introduced exotic wildlife are well documented and, without attempting to elaborate on all of them, a few statistics are noteworthy. Hawaii is perhaps the most staggering example of the results of introduced exotic species. Approximately 60% of Hawaii's 68 native land birds are now extinct due to the intrusion of foreign animals. Australia is another prime example. This continent is still gripped by the unbelievable devastation brought about by the introduction of European rabbits.

Florida's vulnerability to foreign species may bring this predicament a little closer to home. Due to the lack of concentrated investigation in most areas, accurate figures are impossible, however, approximately twenty-six (26) species of fish, fifteen (15) mammals, fifteen (15) birds and more than twenty-five (25) reptiles and amphibians have been released or escaped in Florida. This is a total of eighty-one (81) known biological additives not counting invertebrates, incidental releases or such multi-million dollar nightmares as water hyacinths, eurasian watermilfoil, elodea and so on.

We are sitting on top of dynamite playing catch with blasting caps. The chain must be broken and the first priority should be an educational blitz aimed at the patrons of the pet trade. Most people can recognize the danger represented by a piranha or poisonous snake, but the more intricate problems associated with competition for food and space by animals are received with childlike naivety. It is beyond their comprehension that innocent-looking aquarium fish, only two African land snails, or just one pair of parakeets may jeopardize native wildlife populations.

Florida's campaign began by printing 2,500 posters depicting the problems associated with exotic species. These were distributed to all pet shops, aquarium shops and other wildlife distributors. News releases and magazine articles have been and are continually being, released in an attempt to alert the public to this dilemma. At present, negotiations are underway with major producers of pet trade products in the United States to launch a cooperative public warning campaign. The crux of this crusade is to solicit the aid of pet trade product manufacturers in printing warnings on all aquariums, cages, pet food containers et cetera. This warning explains the problem and emphasizes a "don't release exotic pets" attitude. Hopefully this appeal to the public will curtail a great percentage of the introductions. Nevertheless, some animals will continue to escape or be released. Strict regulatory steps must be taken to help prevent potentially dangerous animals from reaching the wild.

The first, and most drastic step, is a total prohibition on the importation of certain species. In Florida this approach has been applied only to piranha, however, our pending revision of importation requirements may expand this prohibitive category. In essence this approach completely bans importation of the listed species for any reason.

The second system is a restrictive measure that permits certain species to be imported for specific and legitimate reasons. Through a special permitting system, importation of certain noxious species, will only be authorized for scientific research or for reputable exhibition. It will not allow the importation of restricted species by the general public. The intent is to channel the animals that present the greatest potential threat to the welfare of Florida out of the pet trade without severing the educational value of the animals. Any fish or animal that is not listed as either prohibited or restricted is imported under an annual importation permit.

Deciding which animals present the greatest potential threat (obviously almost any animal may cause varying degrees of problems) becomes a heated argument subject to considerable speculation. No one has the right answer. However, the wildlife criteria committee in cooperation with members of the scientific community and interested conservation agencies, can objectively establish initial guidelines.

The selection of these restricted animals should be generally based on four criteria:

- (1) Animals that present a threat to human safety.
- (2) Animals whose characteristic aggressiveness or adaptability would provide keen competition for native wildlife.
- (3) Animals that are characteristically prolific breeders.
- (4) Animals that are potential agricultural pests.

Although these criteria may seem relatively clearcut, they too are subject to a certain amount of latitude and care must be taken not to lax into a "token effort" or to become so strict in interpretation that unnecessary hardships are placed on legitimate dealers. The extent to which these restrictions are taken will be ultimately determined by the attitude and degree of cooperation exhibited by the importers and consumers. Mutual interest, recognition and cooperation are the focal points of this problem and if lacking on the part of either organization, more restrictive measures are inevitable. We have consistently encouraged the formation of interest groups such as the Florida Tropical Fish Farmers Association and their aid in policing their own ranks has been an invaluable contribution to the welfare of Florida.

Because of the large volume of plants and animals that are being exchanged by countries, there are some who prophesize an eventual "homogenization" of the world's fauna and flora. Judging from the present situation, and the apparent non-chalance attached to this problem, the theory may not be far from wrong. It is, however, our responsibility to recognize the severity of the problem and to

protect, to the best of our ability, the integrity of our native wildlife. Night hunters and game fish dealers can undeniably put sizeable dents in local populations. On the other hand, the right combination of exotic species, or the parasites and diseases they bring with them, could wipe out the entire population.

The control of imported foreign animals is indeed a mammoth task, however, the last subject to be aired here today may approach it in severity, if not in magnitude. Exportation of wildlife is certainly not a new twist. Commercial hunters have for a good many years been squeezing a sizeable profit from white-tail deer herds and scale fish populations. The spread of this operation to non-game species, however, is a relatively new innovation and does reveal a few new holds. For example, to a collector or exhibitor, a live alligator may be worth several times the value of the 'gators hide. Prices vary considerably, but 10 foot alligators have been advertised for as much as \$900.00.

The indigo snake (*Drymarchon corais couperi*) is perhaps the most astounding example of the value of live wildlife in the pet trade. Due to an increasing interest by the general public in snakes, prices for the indigo skyrocketed from \$15.00 apiece in Florida to as much as \$60.00 in New York. One large specimen reportedly sold for \$75.00 in Canada and, before protection of the snake in Florida, the cost on the home range was taking the better part of \$40.00. Snake hunting became fashionable as well as profitable and the resulting commercialization, coupled with highway fatalities, habitat destruction and wanton killing, led to a sharp decline in the native population.

Obviously there is seldom an instance where any single factor adversely affects an animal population. Rather it is generally a combination of factors with habitat destruction ranking near the top. This has been best exemplified in Florida by the recent chain of events adversely affecting several turtles.

The alligator snapping turtle (*Macrochelys temmincki*) has not only been sold to turtle collectors, but severe pressure has been exerted by the soup industry. The gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) is not only a popular pet item, but is considered locally as delicacy table fare and the meat is, at least in isolated instances, sold. To make matters worse, the gopher's preference for high and dry habitat unfortunately coincides with prime housing development property. Other turtles, such as Barbour's sawback (*Graptemys barbouri*) have extremely restricted ranges and, although currently on a relatively small scale, may sell for as much as \$20.00

All of these animals have the same factor in common. They are exported for commercial purposes.

Florida has recently enacted landmark regulations which prevent the continuing commercialization of several forms of wildlife. In the case of the indigo, it was placed on the endangered species list which specifically prohibits the taking, selling, offering for sale or possessing of any endangered specie except by permit from the director.

Although less restrictive, a precedent regulation was recently passed that prohibits the buying, selling, offering for sale, possessing for sale, or exporting out of the state any alligator snapping turtle, gopher tortoise or Barbour's sawback without a permit from the director.

In essence, regulatory steps must be taken by the respective states to curtail any expansion of wildlife commercialization. Most non-game species do not have the benefit of effective management practices and populations can be severely damaged if uncontrolled utilization is allowed.

All of the areas that I have discussed here today represent a further widening of the responsibilities that are continually being placed on state game and fish commissions.

It is becoming more evident everyday that we no longer manage and protect just game species, but are responsible for the welfare of all the wildlife. It is a

chore that I think all commissions will accept wholeheartedly if they are given sufficient funds to initiate the needed programs.

The inspections program that I have outlined is an expensive endeavor. It will cost approximately \$18.50 for every inspection that is conducted. The number of inspections needed to adequately do the job in Florida represents more than a quarter of a million dollars annually.

For those of us who are funded primarily by the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, it is unfair to expect the sportsmen to shoulder such a financial burden. Programs such as this should be supported partially by the general public and specifically by the industry that must be regulated.

It is important that we recognize that every state represented here will in the coming years be dealing more and more with these problems. Since many of these areas will involve the interstate movement of animals, it is imperative that one hand know what the other is doing. I propose that each state review and publish its laws concerning exhibition, possession, transportation, importation and exportation of wildlife and that we exchange this material. Obviously all of our requirements will not be the same. However, an attempt to standardize where possible would help make an already complex problem less complicated.

In summation, we must recognize the severity of these problems, initiate projects to deal with them, specialize our personnel, exchange and where possible, standardize our requirements and in the process, exemplify the dedication of all state game and fish commissions to the conservation of all natural resources.

PLANNING AND FUNDING A COMPREHENSIVE LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER TRAINING PROGRAM

Colonel J. Allen Woodburn

"What he don't know won't hurt him." How often we hear that quote, yet how ridiculously false it is. It is the *lack* of knowledge or the *misuse* of the knowledge one possesses which produces undesirable results.

Those charged with the responsibility of planning law enforcement training programs should ask themselves two questions:

1. What is training?
2. What is the objective of law enforcement officer training?

To *train* is to form by instruction, discipline or drill or to teach so as to make fitted, qualified or proficient.

The *objective* of the law enforcement training program is to make the officer prepared to skillfully perform the duties of his office and instill in him such confidence in his equals, superiors, subordinates and himself that he approaches his assignment with determination and enthusiasm.

Any law enforcement agency which fails to recognize that training must include instilling the will to enforce the law in each officer, as well as providing him the information he needs to perform his duties skillfully and with ease, cannot hope to bask in the limelight enjoyed by those who deliver superior performances.

Some may say, "What's the use of planning the most desirable training program? We don't have the money to place it in operation, so it would just be a waste of time." Well, don't you believe it. We must know where we are going, how we expect to get there and be able to justify the trip before the taxpayer is willing to pay the fare. A well planned, comprehensive training program is imperative if we are going to submit a sensible, reasonable and justifiable training budget request.