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Why are Extreme Animal Rights Groups and Uninformed Legislators Sentencing Tigers to Death?

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REXANO Editorial by Zuzana Kukol, www.REXANO.org

Las Vegas, NV, July 25, 2007—Animal rights (AR) activists are behaving worse than a woman on bad PMS, coming in monthly cycles, extremely disturbed and emotional, not bothering with facts and mostly irrational. ARs attacks are more extreme and unprovoked than that of any wild cat known to humankind, and a box of chocolate doesn't seem to cure it.

Just few days ago, a big well funded AR group did a press release claiming that:

“following a recent rash of attacks and maulings involving captive big cats such as lions and tigers, Congresswoman Nancy Boyda (Kansas Second District) has sponsored federal legislation to protect the public from further incidents. H.R. 1947, “Haley’s Act,” aims to protect the public from attacks by captive big cats at facilities licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The act is named in memory of Haley Hilderbrand, a 17-year-old high school student who was killed at a USDA-licensed facility by a 550-pound Siberian tiger while being photographed for her senior picture.”

OK, that was their PMS version, from now on we will stick with facts and truth:

The recent “rash of attacks” occurred in zoos accredited by Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), a powerful private accrediting group, which would be EXEMPT from HR 1947, so we have to flush the ARs public safety argument down the toilet with the rest of monthly toiletries.

AZA zoos manage 3 tiger subspecies with max target population of 150 individuals for each of them. However, what the AZA zoos fail to tell the American public is that only the Siberian tiger has reached that target goal of 150 individuals. The population of other two subspecies only has few dozen tigers, hardly a survival plan; how long will it take before they start inbreeding? You don't have to be a geneticist to figure out that if you only had 150 humans to save human race, pretty soon we would all look the same, not to mention health issues where any single disease would wipe us all out.

“Most of the wild habitat is disappearing and the only chance to save many animals such as tigers from extinction is captive breeding with the private sector having the majority of available habitat” says Shoemaker, a co-founder of REXANO, (Responsible Exotic Animal Ownership, www.REXANO.org) a free web resource designed to give statistics based research material to private owners of exotic animals to fight unfair legislation.

“While Haley’s untimely death is tragic, this bill wouldn’t have prevented this accident. What happened in Haley’s case was a violation of existing USDA rules, which forbid public exhibition of any tiger, lion, cougar, cheetah, leopard, or jaguar over the age of 16 weeks without proper caging or barriers even when restrained (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/bigcatq&a.html>),” says Zuzana Kukol, a Nevada tiger trainer and co-founder of REXANO.

Tiger that killed Haley was a full grown animal and the exhibitor, ‘Lost Creek Animal Sanctuary and Animal Entertainment Productions’, broke the existing regulations that would have prevented this tragedy, and was punished and closed in 2006.

http://www.usda.gov/da/oaljdecisions/AWA_06-0002_110306.pdf

“Since at least 1990 nobody died in US as a result of a captive big cat at large. The best way to avoid being killed by a captive exotic cat is to simply not go on the property where they are being kept.” says Scott Shoemaker.

“How does Haley’s Act ‘ensure humane treatment’ of big cats? There is nothing in the bill that would ensure humane treatment beyond what the Animal Welfare Act already does?” asks Polly Britton, an Ohio animal owner and Secretary of the Ohio Association of Animal Owners, www.OAAO.us. “Looks to me like all Haley’s Act does is create a means for USDA to deny/revoke a license simply because some state or local agency or official recommends it, while placing a moratorium on new private big cat USDA facilities.”

According to reports and various news sources, 18 people were fatally mauled by big cats in the last 17 years (between 1990 and 2007), which is one death per year

<http://www.rexano.org/Statistics/NumberOddsDeathLifeExotic.pdf>.

One fatality was by leopard, one by jaguar, 2 by lions and 13 by tigers. (The 18th death cited by PETA was an apparent suicide of a woman climbing into lions’ cage at the AZA accredited National Zoo at Washington DC).

One of the tigers is responsible for the deaths of 2 people, its female owner and male handler. None of these deaths were the result of the exotic cats at large. Instead, all victims were voluntarily on the property where the animal was kept, be it owner(s), handlers, employees, friends or visitors wanting to see the animals.

Cases breakdown:

- Three fatalities at AZA zoos (2 keepers, 1 suicidal woman claiming into lions' cage)
- One teenager voluntarily posing for pictures, famous Haley's act (where were the parents?)
- Three kids, younger than teens, killed by family/relative's big cat (again, parent's responsibility)
- Two fatalities, adults, cats belonged to their close friend or family member
- NINE were owners/trainers/handlers/employees/circus performers

TOTAL in 17 years:

18 dead, 11 of them were occupational/hobby hazard, (2 AZA zoo workers and 9 trainers/owners).

The odds of being killed by a captive big cat is therefore extremely low. With the current US population being almost 302,000,000 with one death occurring every 13-14 seconds, this translates to approximately 2,440,000 total US deaths per year. With this in mind, the alleged threat of big cats posing a public safety issue seems ridiculous with **the yearly odds of being killed by a captive big cat being one in 302,000,000 equaling to one fatal mauling per year.**

You have a better chance of winning the lottery Jackpot (1 in 13,983,816, all six winning numbers selected) or even the elusive Mega Millions Lottery jackpot (1 in 175,711,536), than being killed by a captive large cat (1 in 302,000,000). But you must visit someone with a large cat to get those odds. Now compare that to deaths by escaped big cats....hmm, can't find those numbers since nobody ever died as a result of captive exotic cat running loose. Animal Rights groups claim to want more regulation and/or banning ownership of big cats in the name of public safety. The odds just don't add up.

Also, wild tigers kill on average 40-60 people per year, even though estimates suggest there are easily more than 5 times as many captive US tigers than the entire wild population. We don't see AR advertising killing these tigers, just the opposite, they usually oppose killing of

any nuisance animals to protect the humans living in tiger, cougar or any predatory animals' vicinity.

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, 53,500 children from ages 0-19 died in 2003, many in activities involving toys, pools, cars, bicycles, boating, sports, but there is no federal legislation restricting the public from them. "Why not, isn't their life/death sensationalized or important enough to name a bill after them?" asks Kukol. **"If the animal rights activists truly care about animals, then why are they trying to regulate and ban them to extinction? What crime did the animals commit to be sentenced to death?"**

REXANO is committed to protect the rights of animal owners and supports responsible private ownership of exotic animals in any form, be it non commercial pet or sanctuary, as well as commercial breeder or exhibitor.