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Escaped lions and tigers and snakes, oh my!

This post was written by snakegetters on 20 January, 2007 (08:19) | [All News](#), [North Carolina News](#), [Odd News](#), [Environmental News](#)

Even here on the coast diametrically opposite to the one where folks eat vegan granola for dinner and demonstrate naked in the streets against the wearing of fur coats, we're pretty familiar with the antics of extreme animal rights activists. From throwing paint on people to picketing at Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants to breaking into farms and laboratories to release captive animals which damage native ecosystems and then die miserably in the wild, their agenda isn't healthy or safe for humans or animals. In many cases, even the well-meaning ones seem to do far more harm than good for the animals they claim to protect. Most of us know that they're a menace, but what North Carolinians might not know is that they've just moved into our neighborhood in force.

A California animal rights organization (API) wrote a bill that was introduced to our legislature in a decidedly sneaky manner. SB1032 is the same bill, word for word, that has been introduced by these California vegans in quite a number of other states. That much they don't deny. But there's another similarity worth noting. In every state where this particular animal rights group has introduced this legislature, a pair of baby lions or tigers "escapes" from an unknown facility in that state and makes the news during the pending legislation. The animals can never be tracked back to any owners. The evidence very strongly suggests that the actual culprits in the "escape" of the animals are not irresponsible private owners of exotic wildlife, but extreme animal rights activists up to shenanigans.

The independent zoo and wildlife professionals in the state of North Carolina support legal regulation on the keeping of exotic animals to ensure public safety and animal welfare. Such regulation already exists (Captive Wildlife Safety Act, S269ES) and is administered by the USDA. What the animal rights extremists are trying to achieve in this state is a total ban that would close all of the smaller zoos, sanctuaries, nature centers, rescue groups, rehabilitators and school outreach educators working with wildlife. The real extremists among them will stop at nothing to achieve their goals, even when people as well as animals may be harmed in the process.

I must ruefully note that they seem to have begun their staging of “dangerous wildlife” events right here in Wilmington. It’s been a remarkably predictable course from state to state, and we expect that more antics are yet to come in the next few crucial weeks.

Today the Cape Fear Serpentarium in Wilmington, North Carolina recieved a remarkably well staged phone call purporting to be a complaint about one of our anacondas getting loose and eating a pet dog. The voices involved were not those of children, and the sound effects quite realistic.

The Serpentarium has never had anacondas, and we are certainly not missing any giant snakes (or any other animals in our well secured and valuable collection).

Today’s temperatures in Wilmington ranged from 31 to 56 degrees. Absolutely none of the giant constrictors and very few reptiles in the world will voluntarily ingest food at 56 degrees, as it would be likely to result in their death. An ectotherm’s biological processes are completely temperature-dependent, and digestion simply would not take place at this temperature, leading to putrefaction in the gut and probable death for the animal. Most reptiles would not even be able to move, or could move only very slowly and weakly, while exposed to temperatures in this range. Constriction would certainly be impossible.

In New Hanover county, calls to the 911 dispatch system that involve reptile emergencies are referred to me. I am responsible for the removal and relocation of nuisance reptiles in this county. We perform this service on a volunteer basis to serve our community. I phoned the 911 dispatcher to determine whether this anaconda incident had any basis whatsoever in fact. I was not particularly surprised to learn that no actual reptile emergencies had been reported today.

In short, here they come again. There may be quite an upcoming media storm if the animal rights activists continue to follow their usual pattern of manufacturing “dangerous exotic wildlife” incidents during pending legislation.

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[Animal rights shenanigans to close neighborhood zoos](#)

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Local zoos and animal attractions have been boosting travel and tourism and helping to educate and entertain the public for many years. Especially in Wilmington, North Carolina, which features the oldest zoo in the state as well as the state's largest and most impressive herpetological collection. In North Carolina, animal attractions must be inspected, licensed and regulated by the USDA for mammals and the WRC for protected reptiles. In addition, there are many other laws and statutes that regulate how wild animals may be kept, bred, exhibited and transported in this state. With strict requirements and regulation that includes mandatory veterinary and safety inspections, your local animal attractions are far more likely to be a positive educational and economic resource for the community than a potential threat to public safety or animal welfare.

Unfortunately that's not the way some animal rights activists see it. In 2006, under the appointment of the North Carolina General Assembly, a study committee began to debate new legislation to regulate "inherently dangerous exotic animals" in North Carolina. This committee was mandated to consult with and represent the interests of 12 groups that would be affected by the proposed legislation, including exotic animal owners, breeders, educators, small zoos and attractions. However, five of the 12 groups named seemed to have been completely left out of this process, while the "humane groups" including animal rights activists were significantly over-represented.

In addition, some rather odd shenanigans went on when the zoo and sanctuary folks who had been left out tried to find out what was going on. In violation of North Carolina's Open Meetings Act, a "sunshine law", we were told that the meetings were closed to the public. Legally they cannot be. What was going on that we were not supposed to know about?

This much we do know. SB1032 was originally written by API (Animal Protection Institute), an animal rights advocacy group from Sacramento, California. API's stated goals are to ban or severely restrict not only zoos and other animal attractions, but all "human use" of animals including farming, hunting, fishing, pet keeping and meat eating. API is quite open about their ultimate agenda and about taking public credit for authoring this bill. We, the independent zoo and wildlife professionals of North Carolina, are very concerned that their activities in North Carolina may lead to the closing of local zoos and attractions statewide if they are left unchecked.

Even though API is openly anti-zoo and opposes all captive wildlife, they were invited into our state by Lorraine Smith, Curator of Mammals at the Asheboro Zoo. Our tax dollars support the Asheboro Zoo, since they do not bring in anywhere near enough revenue to be

self supporting. Yet they are asking the state for a government granted coercive monopoly on the entire zoo and wildlife industry in this state, closing down all other zoos and wildlife facilities including rescue sanctuaries. And the zoo director is currently chairing the study group legislative advisory committee that will help decide whether any other zoos will be allowed to operate in the state of North Carolina.

We don't think it would be a good idea for the director of WalMart to chair a committee that helps decide whether to pass a law that bans all stores in North Carolina that are not owned by WalMart. Unfortunately that is exactly what is happening in our legislature right now. Between animal rights extremists from California and the only zoo in the state that would benefit economically from a ban, this committee's composition is not likely to produce a decision that fairly represents the best interests of North Carolina.

Tanith Tyrr, Curator of Reptiles at the Cape Fear Serpentarium, says "It's a bit of a bizarre situation, as we're the folks who actually help and rescue wild animals and advocate for their welfare, and we find ourselves on the opposite side of a very nasty war with these "animal rights" people. I'd like to see any of them pick up an injured rattlesnake and give it antibiotics and rehabilitation care before releasing it back into the wild, which is what we do. Or provide veterinary care and housing for unwanted, abandoned or abused big cats for the rest of their lives, which is what CCI does. We do what the big zoos can't or won't for lack of time and space. We're the ones out there really helping and rescuing animals.

"We are the independent zoo and wildlife professionals of the state of North Carolina, and we are the evil that these so-called animal rights people are fighting against. We do not abuse animals. We help and rescue them, and we educate your children to respect animals and the environment they live in.

"These extremists want to make it illegal for us to do our jobs in this state, which in practice means suffering and death for the animals that we care about. The "rights" they want to give animals in this state is the right to suffer and die. PETA kills animals."