

Oct. 19, 2007

## Here come the wildlife ordinances ... again

Comes the tiger, gnashing its teeth, its fangs dripping in anticipation of a meal among our school-age population, innocently waiting for the bus at this or that corner.

Little Dakota daydreams about how much fun she'll have in Ms. Hoover's class ... even as the vicious, bloodthirsty beast creeps closer ... ever closer.

(Heck, this is as frightening to some as U.S. military flights out of Nellis droning over Pahrump. What? We weren't notified ahead of time? How dare they? Oh, and by the way: "I support the troops.")



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The imaginary tiger created almost as much stir as the search -- successful, thank goodness -- for Chester A. Stiles, who got so shook up as the feds questioned him that he yarked all over the cruiser.

First it was an "orange" tiger, or the normal Bengal or Siberian model with black stripes and reddish hair.

But hold! Next it was stalking the streets, growling and snarling at the kiddies.

No, hold on, latest report is that it's strolling along Mesquite with the torn body of a black dachshund hanging from its jaws.

Didn't you hear? It just gobbled up Rob Roberts over by the school district office.

By morning I expected to hear that the tiger had knocked over a Rebel convenience store, taken hostages and stolen a sheriff's cruiser.

Well, so far, as was announced the morning after the alleged sighting, no one has found any evidence of a marauding member of the genus *Panthera*, or even hints that an orange tabby was lurking about. If you hear otherwise, demand proof.

But as Zuzana Kukor remarks in a letter in this edition, it seems more than a bit suspicious that the call about the animal was made just before a March 24 hearing on zoning proposals that would affect exotic animals.

One wonders: If the ordinances in question focused on wild birds, would we hear that the flying reptile Rodan had been spotted, orbiting the peaks of the Nopah Range, leering hungrily at the helpless elderly?

The whole business is worrisome on a variety of fronts.

If, as Scott Shoemaker writes, planning chief Jack Loman said people "have a right to know" what legal activities their neighbors are pursuing, then Loman has a peculiar outlook. My feeling is that the American people -- even those in Pahrump -- have a right to act legally without being bothered.

If it's legal for me to own a bright green fire engine, then it's nobody's business what is inside that oversize garage I have. If there is no law barring me from lounging around my pool enclosure naked, then no one has any right to know I've dropped my drawers.

There may be a right to know, although it certainly hasn't been enshrined in the Constitution; there is also a "right to privacy," to be left the heck alone when you're not annoying your neighbors or breaking the law. And even if you are suspected of fracturing the law, the state still has to proceed carefully or risk being shown the door when it goes to court.

Loman allegedly told Shoemaker he wouldn't want someone with a tiger living next door. But if it's legal for someone to possess that tiger, then Loman and anyone else with the same concern has a choice -- they can move somewhere else.

Zoning needs to make sense, period. It should not be used as a plaything for personal agendas or an excuse for groups or individuals to promote fear and ignorance.

I would not be for an ordinance that allows wildlife to roam the streets loose (but on the other hand, I certainly want to allow such wildlife to be executed out of hand). I think those, like Kukor and Shoemaker, who raise what may be called "exotics" have a responsibility to guarantee their animals are secure and are properly caged, penned, or whatever.

I also think the rules have to match the situation. A regulation meant to deal with lions and tigers needs adjustments built in before it can deal sensibly with ocelots, servals or caracals.

Now to be honest, I recently had the great good fortune to visit with Kukor and Shoemaker and see a variety of their animals.

Given the security they have established and clearly maintain, I would feel more endangered driving to and from their compound than while I am at it.

Their lion was so threatening that he was delirious when Zuzana rubbed his belly with a wire brush. Pepper the tiger nuzzled my face through the cage and then ignored me. The bobcat and the ocelot also indicated an utter lack of interest in my presence. (In any case, the cats are all declawed.)

Their new, young and nutty mountain lion kitten was like any feline kitten. She wanted to play. She would suddenly rush up, wrap her forepaws around my thigh and then press her face up against me. There was never a single hint of her teeth; she simply did not bite, period. And whenever she wrapped her paws harmlessly around my leg, Zuzana would spray her in the face with water to back her off. She is being trained to proper behavior around people.

These incredible, beautiful creatures are well fed, well watered, well treated, and even were they to escape from their seriously secure enclosures, I think they'd mostly be scared to death and probably be crying to get back inside.

I have no worry about ordinances unless they make no sense.

Wednesday's planned hearing by the county commission will be a chance to be heard. Scheduled for 8:30 a.m., one hopes it will put into play some common sense about animal protection and preservation.