

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE SPCA

EXOTIC ANIMAL WORLD

Date: 25 July 2024

Time: 12:13 – 15:53

Contact details: Esther van der Westhuizen (Owner) – 060 646 1048
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Gil Hawkins (Animal Care Manager)
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Address: c/o R44 & N1, Klapmuts

Area: Paarl, Western Cape

Attending Inspectors: Jason Page (Inspector)
Jon Friedman (wildlife Supervisor)
Trevor Rodney (Inspector)

Compiled by: Jason Page

Background:

On 23 July 2024, the Cape of Good Hope SPCA (SPCA) received a complaint regarding reptiles kept at the above-mentioned facility. It is alleged that one of the reptiles are severely compromised and had been kept in a plastic container for approximately one week. The complainant also expressed his concern over the overall husbandry of the reptiles and alleges that all the reptiles require veterinary attention. The complainant further provided us with a signed affidavit where he mentions all his observations and concerns.

The Cape of Good Hope SPCA has been inspecting this facility for years. Various warnings had been issued to this facility. Concerns addressed in those warnings related to veterinary treatment and the keeping conditions of reptiles, amongst other things.

After receiving the complaint and due to the SPCA experiencing some difficulties with the facility in the past, we drafted a court order application to be presented to the Magistrate in that area. However, after we had drafted it we were notified that the facility is aware of the inspection we intend to carry out. The court order was therefore not necessary as they would now not have any concern granting us entry.

Findings:

On Thursday, 25 July 2024, we responded to the complaint. Due to none of us being authorized for that area, we first had to go to the Paarl Magistrate Court to apply for such. After which, we went to the facility. We announced our arrival at the reception area and they then called Gil who accompanied us upon our inspection. As expected, they did not hesitate to allow us onto the property.

Gil explained that they check on all the animals daily and ensure that they always have sufficient food and water. All of the enclosures were seen to be in an acceptable hygienic state. The water pond in the slider enclosure is cleaned as necessary according to Gill. The pond was being cleaned on the day of our inspection. Some of the animals were provided with heating sources, like some of the reptiles

and the meerkats. They also have a 'warm room' which is off display. In this room they keep compromised animals, reptiles and any other animals which they don't have space for in the display areas. There are also enclosures which are not fixed to the ground, standing in the hall ways off display. These enclosures were seen to be placed directly on the ground and in the way where they might get kicked by passing staff. They have a double door system in place at some of the enclosures as a measure to prevent escape. They have staff cutting down branches to put in all the enclosures of animals which might use them, birds, monkeys, etc. This is done every 7-10 days.

They claimed that they do not breed with any of their animals. However, some animals were seen with their young. Gill explained that this is due to the animals coming to the facility pregnant. They further explained that they try to separate the animals by sexes to prevent breeding. They also remove the eggs from the bird and tortoise enclosures when they see them.

The facility provides educational tours for schools. They do demonstrations twice per day only on weekends. The animals are on rotation, animals who are used today, will not be used again for a couple of days. Gill also claimed that if the animals does not feel well, they won't be used. Interactions are allowed during demonstrations but only under supervision. Demonstrations take place at 11:00 and then again at 14:00 and normally only lasts about 40min per session.

The budgies and canaries are fed a variety of seeds, vegetables, sorghum and fruit. Parrots are fed lentils, corn, sorghum, AVI pellets, sunflower seeds, micronized maize, peas and a variety of fruit and vegetables. The tortoises are fed a variety of fruit and vegetables. The meerkats are fed fruit, vegetables, dog tin food and dry cat food (pellets). All of the above-mentioned animals seen at the facility is fed twice per day as per Gill.

The owls in their care is fed day old chicks, chicken necks and frozen rodents. They are provided with calcium at times but they do not follow a schedule as to when calcium is provided. The owls are fed every 2-3 days and each owl is fed 3 day old chicks (or the equivalent thereof) per feed.

The red ear sliders are fed both vegetables and meat. They are fed daily and the facility alternates the feed by providing meat three times per week with vegetables in between. They feed green vegetables, gizzards, chicken hearts and chicken necks. They are also provided with calcium at times.

All the ferrets are neutered. Both ferrets and tenrecs are fed dry cat food (pellets), dog tin food, raw eggs and chicken necks. They are fed daily and no supplements used on their food.

The facility makes use of frontline and revolution products as a form of external parasite control. All the animals are checked by a veterinarian at least once per year unless they get injured or diseased in which case they will then be taken sooner.

The chinchillas are fed a chinchilla specific food. They are provided with a specific sand and climbing opportunities. Two of the chinchillas used to be housed with various small birds. We have, in the past, addressed this as chinchillas are nocturnal where as the birds are diurnal and by keeping the two together might disturb rest and sleeping patterns. During this inspection, the chinchillas had been moved to a different enclosure away from the birds.

The tarantulas are fed once per week and they are fed mealworms and crickets.

The marmoset monkeys are fed cerelac baby food, monkey chow, fruit, vegetables and scrambled eggs. They are fed twice per day with no supplements.

The facility claims that they have about 700 animals and that they are at capacity. Their last owl came into the facility from a member of public approximately 2 years ago. Gill explained that all indigenous

animals, caught in the wild, that are brought to the facility is referred to the veterinarian for euthanasia.

We also specifically asked to go to the reticulated python which had been complained about. Gill took us to where he was kept. The python is approximately 5.5 meters long. The python appeared to be in a very bad condition. He appeared to be lethargic and to have a respiratory infection. This was all confirmed by Gill as she explained that the snake went to the veterinarian yesterday. The veterinarian said that the python must be provided with heat sources, the snake must receive an amikacin injection every 72 hours and the snake's mouth must be washed out at the same time. The enclosure the snake is kept in had some form of heating provided. The snake is fed still born lambs, piglets and adult frozen rabbits.

All the concerns seen during the inspection and the recommendations we had to improve the keeping conditions of the animals were brought up with Gill. We advised her that we would draft the warning and sent it to them via email. After this discussion, we left the facility and went back to the office.

Action:

A warning (Warning 14362) had been issued to the facility addressing all the concerns we observed during our inspection. The following had been addressed:

Warned:

1. To provide the SPCA with a veterinary report for the severely compromised reticulated python ("Queen"). We also mentioned that surrendering the animals to the SPCA is an option.
2. The anaconda snake seen with the respiratory infection and the incomplete shed needs to be maintained in an adequately humid environment and receive adequate veterinary treatment for the respiratory infection.
3. To provide the SPCA with the most recent veterinary report for the green iguana.
4. To provide the Dumeril's boa with adequate humidity in its enclosure to assist its shedding. It needs to be provided adequate heat as its enclosure is below temperature.
5. The adult yellow corn snake with "corn snake hips" must receive adequate enrichment in order to exercise more frequently and to have its feed intake monitored.
6. To provide the one carpet python, seen to have numerous dorsal burn wounds, with adequate veterinary treatment.
7. To provide the two angulate tortoises seen in the warm room with adequate veterinary treatment.
8. One brown house snake was seen with blue eye caps over the eyes. It was explained to us that he is struggling to shed. To assist the one brown house snake which is struggling to shed, with the shedding process.
9. We have serious concerns pertaining to the enclosures in which reptiles at Exotic Animal World are currently housed. Various enclosures afford inadequate natural light (lack access to sufficient sun), inadequate and/or insufficient heat provision, inadequate ventilation, and lack sufficient hiding space and environmental enrichment conducive to their overall wellbeing.
10. To vaccinate the ferrets in their care.

Recommended:

1. That no animal be denied adequate heating in its enclosure for the remainder of the winter season, this is especially considered in the case of the ectotherms on display.
2. That the green iguana should be provided with overhead heating by means of a heat bulb.
3. That working thermostats to be installed in enclosures that do not have supplemental heat bulb heating.

4. That the animals seen at the facility that are being kept directly on the floor to be lifted off of the ground as to prevent anyone bumping into them as they walk past.
5. We recommended that they keep relevant records (admission records, veterinary reports, regular footage, etc.) as to keep track of animals' recovery after being received in a compromised state, or alternatively consider surrendering these animals to the SPCA.
6. That adult female guinea pigs over two (2) years old be spayed or alternatively euthanised as they have a propensity to develop ovarian diseases when not sterilised.
7. That all guinea pigs to receive anti-parasite treatments with internal and external parasite control on a more regular basis.
8. That F-10 product spray bottles be provided at entrances for visitors and staff to use to apply on hands and feet when entering/ leaving the enclosures.
9. That sharp ends from mesh wiring used to patch holes in fencing at perch areas and on aviary sides should be removed or bent to prevent injury to the aviary inhabitants.

Animals seen on inspection were:

#	Species	# of animals	Concerns
E1	Budgies Doves	12 4	• Aviaries where chinchillas are housed in.
E2	Leopard tortoises	16	
E3	Meerkat	0:2:0	
E4	Meerkat	2:0:0	
E5	Canaries	8	
E6	Spotted Eagle owl	8	
E7	Red Ear Sliders	9	• Pond is usually unhygienic.
E8	Angulate Tortoises Leopard Tortoises	20 4	
E9	Alexandrine Parakeet	1:1:0	
E10	Sun conure	3	
E11	Lorikeets	2	
E12	Ferrets	3:2:0	• Not vaccinated
E13	Amazon Parrot Senegal Alexandrine Parakeet	3 1 2	
E14	Chinchillas	1:1:0	
E15	Amazon Parrot	5	
E16	African Grey Parrot Rabbits	5 0:3:0	• One African grey seen with scissor beak. His beak is being trimmed regularly. Last trimmed 8-9 days ago.
E17	Mixed aviaries	30	
E18	Caiman	1:0:0	
E19	Iguana	1	• No heating provisions.
E20	African Clawed Frogs	10	
E21	Grey Rat Snake	1	
E22	Corn Snake	1	
E23	Corn Snake	1	
E24	Leopard Gecko	1	
E25	Chinchillas	1	
E26	Chinchillas	1	
E27	Chinchillas	2	

E28	Carpet Python	1	
E29	Bibrons Thick Toed Gecko	1	
E30	African Land Snails	15	
E31	Australian Stick Insect	1	
E32	Tarantula	1	
E33	Corn Snake	3	
E34	Roaches	60	
E35	Mexican Fire Leg tarantula	1	
E36	Brazilian Black Tarantula	1	
E37	Chilean Rose Tarantula	1	
E38	Mexican Fire Leg Tarantula	1	
E39	Chilean Rose Tarantula	1	
E40	Chilean Rose Tarantula	1	
E41	Guinea Pig	1:0:0	• Huge open wound on back. On treatment with Silbecor ointment. • Enclosure is directly on the ground.
E42	Guinea Pigs	2:0:0	• Enclosure is directly on the ground.
E43	Guinea Pigs	0:2:0	• Enclosure is directly on the ground.
E44	Corn Snake	1	
E45	Ball Python	1	
E46	Chinchillas	4	
E47	Scorpion	1	
E48	Chinchillas	1	
E49	Chinchillas	1	
E50	Guinea Pigs	2:0:0	
E51	Guinea Pigs	0:2:0	
E52	Ball Python	1	
E53	Ball Python	1	
E54	Spotted Eagle Owl	1	• Injury on eye. This animal has been in quarantine for 13 days. No veterinary attention but is under treatment with an ointment for the injury.
E55	Ball Python	1	
E56	Red Knee Tarantula	1	
E57	Mexican Fire Leg Tarantula	1	
E58	Tiger Rump Tarantula	1	
E59	Curly Hair Tarantula	1	
E60	Curly Hair Tarantula	1	
E61	Tarantula	1	
E62	Ball Python	1	
E63	Corn Snake	1	• Has a condition referred to as “corn Snake hips”. • Was surrendered to the facility about 4months ago.
E64	Corn Snake	1	
E65	Ball Python	1	
E66	Leopard Gecko	1	

E67	Tenrecs	7	
E68	Corn Snake	1	
E69	Carpet Python	1	
E70	Carpet Python	1	Has severe burn marks on his body.
E71	Carpet Python	1	
E72	Carpet Python	1	
E73	Ball Python	1	
E74	Brown House Snake	1	Has blue caps over his eyes.
E75	Sugar Glider	1	
E76	Bearded Dragon	1:0:0	
E77	Bearded Dragon	0:1:0	
E78	Bearded Dragon	1:0:0	
E79	Guinea Pigs	0:1:3	The female came in pregnant and gave birth at the facility.
E80	Hedgehog	1:0:0	
E81	Hedgehog	0:7:0	
E82	Guinea Pigs	1	
E83	Tenrec	1	
E84	Tenrec	1	
E85	Tenrec	1	
E86	Guinea Pigs	0:1:0	Guinea Pig appears to be blind.
E87	Guinea Pig	1:0:0	Recovering from hair loss.
E88	Guinea Pig	1:0:0	
E89	Leopard Tortoise	0:0:5	
E90	Angulate Tortoise	0:0:1	Seen to be lethargic and appears unwell.
E91	Scorpions	0:0:10	They were recently born at the facility.
E92	Angulate Tortoise	0:0:1	Appears to be severely compromised.
E93	Brown House Snake	1	
E94	Leopard Gecko	1:0:0	
E95	Leopard Gecko	1	
E96	Bull Frog	1	
E97	Leopard Gecko	1	Severely injured toes. We were told that the injuries on the toes are burn wounds. They are disinfecting the toes and treating it with Silbikor.
E98	Anaconda	1	Was seen to have a respiratory infection. He was also under treatment for the same.
E99	Lourie	1:0:0	
E100	Pigeons	3	
E101	Budgies	5	
E102	Eclectus Parrot	1:0:0	
E103	African Grey Parrot	1	
E104	Cockatoo	1	
E105	Cockatoo	1	
E106	Ring neck parakeets	2	

E107	Amazon parrots	2	One of them experienced some feather loss. Gill explained that this is due to overgrooming from cage mate.
E108	Sun Conure	2	They are very old.
E109	African Grey	1	Experienced feather loss on his body/breast.
E110	Marmoset Monkey	3:4:0	
E111	Fish (Mollies & Angel Fish)	15	
E112	Gold Fish	20	
E113	Gourami	30	
E114	Fish (Various)	40	
E115	Shrimp	60	
E116	Barbs	20	
E117	Guppies	50	
E118	Fish (Various)	15	
E119	Fish (Various)	40	
E120	Reticulated Python	1	5.5 meters long. - Suffers from a respiratory disease. Is on treatment.
E121	Oscars	3	
E122	Marmoset Monkey	1	
E123	Marmoset Monkey	2	
E124	Marmoset Monkey	1	This monkey is very old.
E125	Hans Macaw	2	
E126	Mixed Aviary (Cockatiels & Budgies)	30	
E127	Cockatoo Guinea Pigs	2 13:0:0	
E128	Fish (Various)	100	
E129	Piranha Fish (Various)	4 100	
E130	Rat Snake	1:0:0	
E131	Fish (Various)	100	
E132	Fish (Various)	10	
E133	Ringtail Lemurs Birds (Various)	2 30	
E134	Ringtail Lemurs Birds (Various)	6 10	
E135	Iguana	1:0:0	- There appears to be an injury/deformity on the iguana's mouth. - Heating is not sufficient.
E136	Angulate Tortoises	15	Heating is not sufficient.
E137	Blue Tongued Skink	4	
E138	Giant Plated Lizard	2	
E139	Dumeril's Boa	1	Heating is not sufficient.
E140	Guinea Pigs African Grey Parrot	43 30	Some of the birds were seen to be experiencing feather loss.
E141	African Grey Parrot	11	
E142	Hawk Headed Parrot	1	

E143	Salamanders Fish (Various)	6 30	
E144	Fish (Various)	60	
E145	Fish (Various)	30	
E146	Fish (Various)	30	

Follow Up:

The facility sent us emails responding to the warning issued. In the emails they addressed all concerns raised by the SPCA. The veterinary concerns were addressed and we received a report from their veterinarian, Dr. Egbert Companion from Cape Companion Veterinary Clinic. Please find his comments on the animals he examined below:

“Queen, the reticulated python: Seen on Wednesday 24/7/24. Report in your possession. Additionally, advise doing a 15-30min soak in shallow bath of F10SC (4ml/L water) on days of Amikacin injections (q72h) due to concerns over condition of ventral scales. She appears to be near dysecdysis.

Angulate tortoises: Recently surrendered, moved to heated room/enclosure. The larger individual is keeping his left eye closed. I cleaned and examined the eye and no discharge or pathology detected. No nasal discharge. The smaller individual is displaying doubled scutes on the carapace in what has to be a congenital or incubation artefact. No visible effect on health of individual. Both are eating well since receiving artificial heating.

Recommendation: Keep warmed and provide appropriate lighting until Spring or Summer arrives. The to be placed out into outdoor enclosure. Monitor growth and for ocular or nasal discharge throughout.

Brown House Snake: Dull eye caps, bilateral. Initially thought to be retained eye caps after unsuccessful shed, followed by an unsuccessful attempt to remove them. In my opinion this is not the case, but, potentially, old healed scars. Even more likely, these are simply artefact of his advanced age. This is a spectacular specimen. I could not verify the sex (probes not with me at the time), but if this is really a male, it is huge and potentially ancient! This is a typical Natal locality specimen and they are, by far, the largest brown house snakes in Southern Africa, but, even so, this is an amazing specimen. It is in perfect health and condition. I’ve advised the inspect the next shed skin for evidence of retained eye caps.

Dumeril’s Boa: Paritally shed skin. Advise aiding individual in completing the shed by removing the final few pieces on skin left behind. Advise providing at least one damp hide in enclosure to assist in process in the future. This is, however, a dry scrubland species from South West Madagascar and should not be kept in overly moist, high humidity conditions.

Corn snake: Recently surrendered. Obese and large fat deposits in last 1/3 of body as is unfortunately common in captive corn snakes. The only practical option here is to reduce the frequency and volume of feeding gradually. I would recommend, as a maintenance diet, 1 adult mouse or similar every 2-4w depending on ambient temperatures. Enrichment could be provided, but is unlikely to improve the situation. Furthermore, once these fat deposits are made, they rarely get broken down, regardless of the efforts made.

Carpet python: Dorsal burn wounds. These were superficial and treated with Silbecor ointment at the time. The wounds were covered in retained shed skin. Upon removal of these sections of shed skin, healthy granulated tissue could be inspected. These wounds have healed and require no further treatment.

Anaconda: Upper respiratory infection. Oral cavity and glottis examined and no lesions or ulceration found. Excess mucous in nasopharynx. Therefore, advise treating with a second course of antibiotics and Amikacin 100mg/2ml vials dispensed for injection at 2.5mg/kg q72h i/m. This is a low grade infection and should respond rapidly to treatment. Advise maintaining ambient temperatures at 28°C for optimal distribution of the medication.”

The veterinarian also gave his opinion on the vaccination of the ferrets. Please see his comments below:

“Considering the absence of safe and predicably reliable vaccines against distemper in South Africa, the potential of adverse reactions to both rabies and combination/live distemper vaccines, the potential of unproven antibody production when alternative vaccines are used and the extremely low risk potential for this captive group, I would advise against vaccination altogether. Instead, I recommend, either not accepting any new arrivals, or applying strict quarantine protocols before any new introductions to the current group. This is my recommendation after discussion with several veterinary practitioners including Dr Annelie Cloete at Elsenburg.”

The veterinarian is also not comfortable in sterilizing the guinea pigs as he is worried about the effects the procedure would have on female guinea pigs. They decided to keep the males and females separate to prevent breeding instead of sterilization.

They also advised that they did an audit of all their reptile enclosures and that they would need more time to rectify all the concern in this regard. Esther explained that they hired a qualified electrician to set up heating sources in all enclosures. We granted them additional time to rectify these concerns.

Upon the follow up inspection, we were again met with the manager, Gil. She again granted us access to the facility and accompanied us. We again inspected all of the animals listed above. Only myself and Jon was present during this inspector.

The python, “Queen”, was given away to a person called Gerrie in Montegu, Western Cape. We confirmed that this was true. Queen is still undergoing treatment and is still recovering.

The facility was also given 16 Duiker that Cape Nature confiscated from a property in the Western Cape. We do not know much about this confiscation apart from the fact that it took place outside of our area of jurisdiction.

The reptile enclosures have been improved and all the reptiles now have heating sources. The facility also has a lot of open reptile enclosures, which were not provided with heating. However, these were not being used.

No compromised animals were seen during the time of this inspection and we confirmed that all the animals that were in need of veterinary intervention, received such.

No other contraventions observed during the time of our inspection. I am of the view that although this facility had complied with the warning issued, we still have to carry out regular follow up inspections to ensure compliance.

[End]