

The Mt Hope Exotic Auction in Ohio

Background Information:

Ohio was one of the few states that had virtually no rules regulating the sale and ownership of exotic animals. The Department of Natural Resources regulates only Ohio-native species: bobcats, coyotes, black bears, rattlesnakes, and copperhead snakes.

The need for a complete ban of certain wild animals and strict regulations in regards to the ownership became more evident than ever due to three recent, tragic incidents in Ohio:

- On October 18, 2011, law enforcement struggled to secure the area around Zanesville, OH as the owner of an exotic park shot himself after releasing his animals. 49 animals including 17 lions, 18 Bengal tigers and 2 grizzly bears were killed. Owner Terry Thompson, had previous convictions for animal cruelty and illegal possession of firearms.

http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/20/us/ohio-animals-on-loose/?hpt=us_c2

- On September 20, 2011 the 80-year-old owner of Kokas Exotics in Green Camp, OH was seriously injured when he was kicked by his 6-foot-tall, 200-pound male kangaroo.

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2011/09/kangaroos-powerful-kick-lands-man-in-hospital/>

- In August 2010, 24-year-old Brent Kandra was killed by a bear at the privately owned “World Animal Studios” near Lorain.

<http://chronicle.northcoastnow.com/2011/03/01/coroner-brent-kandra-had-more-than-600-wounds-from-bear-attack/>

Reacting to the public pressure after the October 18, 2011 incident, Governor Kasich signed Senate Bill 310 into law on June 5, 2012. The new exotic animal law bans acquisition, sale and breeding new ownership of certain exotic animals by January 1, 2014. Existing owners will have to register their animals with the state and follow regulations on caging and care. Restricted species are bears, elephants, large cats, certain monkeys, alligators, crocodiles, rhinos, anacondas longer than 12 feet and certain venomous snakes.

It is questionable the new law will be able to prevent another tragedy from happening, since the new law offers multiple exemptions and does only provide limited enforcement options.

<http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/local/2012/06/06/kasich-signs-ohios-first-exotic-animal-regulations.html>

Mt Hope Exotic Auction:

Location:

Mt. Hope Auction
8076 SR 241
Millersburg, OH 44654
www.mthopeauction.com

Managers:

Thurman & Chester Mullet

Auction Veterinarian:

Dr. Robert C. Collett

Animals included in auction:

Peafowl, Waterfowl, Quail, Primates, Exotic Birds, Kangaroos, Wallabies, Exotic Sheep, Exotic Cattle, Buffalo, Camels, Zebras, Muntjac, Elk, Deer, Llamas, Alpaccas, Ostriches, Emus, Rheas, Reptiles, Snakes, Alligators, Frogs, Mice, Wolves, Domestic Animals

Observations:

The Mt. Hope exotic animal auction is a 2-3 day event, held 2 times a year. Over 100 different species are offered for sale. All animals offered for sale have to have a health certificate. Certain species require additional paperwork such as a USDA license, TB test, Pullorum Fowl Test or Brucellosis test.

9/15/11-9/17/11

Investigators arrived at the auction at 8:00am. The parking lots were full with vehicles from NY, NJ, PA, TN, NC, IN, MI, VA, IL and OH. Several private hunting preserves, exotic animal farms and zoos were in attendance.



In one of the parking lots, a large tent was set up that housed different types of chickens, ducks, geese, pheasants, peacocks, guinea hens and rabbits. The cages were stacked on top of each other, 5 and 6 cages high. Many of the cages did not give the animals enough room to move around. Some cages contained straw, but several had nothing but the barren wire for the animals to sit on.



Several cages containing larger birds were home-made and the birds could not move around at all. Other cages were piled on top of each other without care and were very unstable. Most cages did have a small container for food and water but the majority of the containers were empty on the 2nd day. The auction flyer states that the auction does not provide food or water for any caged animal and that it is responsibility of the owner to take care of their animals. The auction does not monitor if that really happens.



Example of home-made bird cage



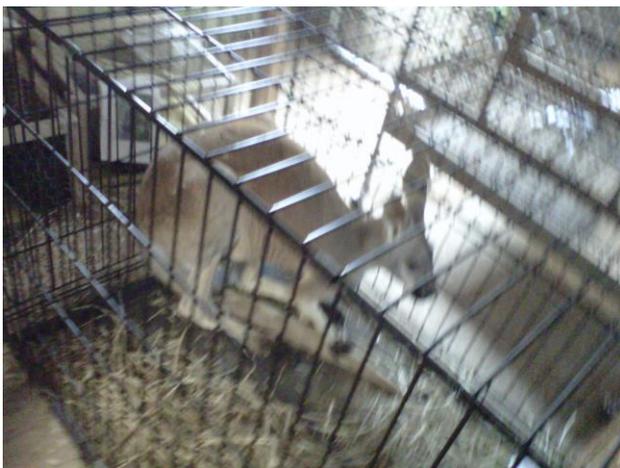
Cages piled on top of each other without care

According to the market report, there were 505 pheasants, 859 rabbits, 1752 (!) cages with chicken, 242 peafowl, 228 geese, 179 doves, 956 pigeons and 1223 ducks at the sale.



In addition to the tent, there were 2 trailers in the parking lot, each approx. 45 ft long. One housed monkeys, baboons, capuchin, spider monkeys and tamarin monkeys. It also contained miniature pigs, kudamundi, kangaroos, sloths, and hedge hogs.

The other trailer contained reptiles and mice, a few different types of constricting snakes, poisonous date frogs, tortoises, a 12" alligator, a 2' alligator and a 5 foot alligator that **had his mouth taped shut**. Again, very few cages contained food or water. Not all of these animals were listed in the market report.



Inside the main building were all different kinds of tropical birds from small finches to large parrots and macaws. Also in this area were ferrets and chinchillas.

In the pen area behind the main auction ring were white tail deer and a few albino deer. The smaller pens housed fallow deer. There were several pens with female elk and 3 male elk with very large antlers. This area also had different hump camels, zebras and zedonks. Buyers for the different hunting preserves were walking from pen to pen and discussing the condition of the animals.



To the investigator's surprise, one of the pens contained 2 Grevy's zebras, which are on the endangered species list. According to the African Wildlife Foundation, there are only 2500 Grevy's zebras left in the wild. Grevy's zebras are only found in northern Kenya and south eastern Ethiopia.



Concerned about their presence at the auction, Animals' Angels contacted the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

The ODNR Enforcement Department informed them that the Endangered Species Act only covers animals that are **bought or sold in interstate commerce**.

In other words: If an endangered animal is born in captivity in Ohio it can legally be sold to any hunting farm within the state.

§ 1538. Prohibited acts

(1) Except as provided in sections 6(g)(2) and 10 of this Act [16 USCS §§ 1535(g)(2), 1539], with respect to any endangered species of fish or wildlife listed pursuant to section 4 of this Act [16 USCS § 1533] it is unlawful for any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States to-

(A) import any such species into, or export any such species from the United States;

B) take any such species within the United States or the territorial sea of the United States

(C) take any such species upon the high seas;

D) possess, sell, deliver, carry, transport, or ship, by any means whatsoever, any such species taken in violation of subparagraphs (B) and (C);

(E) deliver, receive, carry, transport, or ship in interstate or foreign commerce, by any means whatsoever and in the course of a commercial activity, any such species;

(F) sell or offer for sale in interstate or foreign commerce any such species; or

Ohio state law only offers protection to endangered species native to Ohio or migrate or are “otherwise reasonably likely to occur” in Ohio.

In another section of the auction were pens with cattle, mini horses and cages with skunks, raccoons, possums, porcupines as well as different types of foxes and hybrid wolves. According to the market report, the zebras sold between \$2250 and \$4000, the wolves sold for between \$60 and \$550.

3/29/12-3/31/12

The March 2012 sale was well advertized. A notice on the auctions website stated:

***Notice:** No bears, tigers, cats, wolves (including hybrids) are permitted at any of our sales. Also, all primates will be banned at the spring sale as well as constricting snakes. The subject of New World Monkeys has been discussed, but at this time they will also not be offered at the sale. We are sorry for the inconvenience this causes. The State of Ohio is currently working on new regulations regarding the animals discussed. We thank you for your patience as we also wait on the proposed legislation.*

Again, there were thousands of animals, including zebras, buffalo, deer, camels, snakes and birds offered for sale during the three day event. A long line of trucks and cars was waiting to unload their animals, **with some of them waiting 5 hours or more**. Animals were delivered in things like cardboard boxes, homemade cages and plastic tubs.

In the main auction building, all the larger animals such as buffalo, bison, zebras, camels and deer were sold. Several of these animals can be found at Ohio's many, private hunting preserves, where hunters pay as much as \$5,000.00 to shoot a water buffalo, \$2,000 for a fallow deer and \$2,000 to \$6,000 for an elk.



In one of the large barns the bird & rabbit auction took place. All sorts of exotic and domestic birds were piled on top of each other. Peacocks were kept in tiny cages, their long tails were sticking out of the back. They were unable to move or turn around.

Some cages had fallen from the pile and were left hanging in between other cages or were laying on their side. Some birds were very agitated and were trying to attack the bird in the cage next to them. Some cages that contained doves or chicken were very crowded.





Rabbits on bare wire

Most cages had water at some point, but by the 2nd day most of the containers at the birds sale were observed empty. Some rabbit cages did not have flooring and the animals were forced to stand on the bare wire.

Also on the premises were two trailers which contained snakes, frogs, porcupines, silver foxes, wallabies and tortoises. Some of the large tortoises were kept in plastic tubs with very small air holes and they were unable to extend their head & neck from their shell.



Tortoise in plastic tub with tiny air holes



Silver Fox

The trailers were very crowded with auction visitors and the boxes containing animals on floor level were kicked a lot. There were many families with kids and the cages/boxes with “cute” animals were opened constantly to take a closer look and to pet them, causing a lot of stress for the animals.

Conclusion:

We noticed some improvement between our visits in September 2011 and March 2012. Wolves, primates and large constricting snakes were no longer for sale. Most animals had access to water on the first sale day. However, the overall conditions at the sale, especially for the birds and the animals in the trailers were not satisfactory.

The Mt Hope auction sale flyer states that all cages animals & birds must be visible in sturdy cages with proper ventilation and adequate space. It also states that no cardboard boxes or closed containers are accepted and that it is the responsibility of the owner to feed and water the animal.

Our observations show that animals were delivered in inappropriate cages that were weak, without flooring or too small for the animal that was confined in it. Animals in plastic containers with very limited air holes and overcrowded cages were also documented. A lot of birds and rabbits were out of water on the 2nd sale day. Aggressive birds were placed in cages next to each other and observed fighting. Cages were stacked chaotic and without care, resulting in several cages falling or tipping over.

Suggestions:

Auction Management should:

- Check all cages upon arrival at the auction and refuse weak, unstable cages or cages without flooring.
 - Check of number of animals placed in cages upon arrival at the auction and refuse overcrowded cages.
 - Refuse all animals brought in plastic containers with insufficient air holes.
 - Advise auction employees to use proper diligence when placing cages. Ensure that all cages are placed in a safe and stable manner and that aggressive birds are not placed next to each other.
 - Advise auction employees to check access to food and water of all animals during all three sale days.
- Communicate to sellers that they will be banned from future sales if their animal is found without food or water.
- Limit number of auction visitors allowed into trailers at the same time to avoid overcrowding and kicking of cages on floor level. Monitor auction visitors in trailers and restrict opening of cages and petting of animals.