



Press Release



For Immediate Release

Landmark Bill Introduced in Ontario to Protect Captive Wildlife and Regulate Zoos

TORONTO, ON [December 4, 2024] – An Ontario MPP has taken a groundbreaking step towards improving animal welfare and public safety with the introduction of the Captive Wildlife Protection Act, 2024. World Animal Protection, a global leader in animal welfare, joined Lucille Collard, MPP for Ottawa-Vanier, and Dolf DeJong, CEO of the Toronto Zoo to announce the bill today.

The Act aims to address the lack of provincial oversight for captive wildlife, which currently allows anyone to collect wild animals like lions and tigers and operate as a zoo, resulting in the proliferation of dangerous and cruel “roadside zoos”. These attractions often keep wild animals in substandard conditions, risking public safety and causing animal suffering. Ontario is the weakest jurisdiction when it comes to regulating the keeping of wild animals, and so it’s no surprise then that Ontario is home to the highest number of these dangerous facilities across Canada. No licence is needed to keep non-native wild animals in a zoo or to meet consistent standards, leaving municipalities to manage with ineffective and inconsistent bylaws.

The proposed bill introduces mandatory licensing for zoos, along with annual inspections to enforce high standards of care and safety. It also prohibits the use of wild animals for entertainment purposes, such as petting sessions, photo opportunities and performances that compromise their welfare. Facilities will be required to meet clear licensing requirements, including proof of financial resources and emergency preparedness plans.

The bill covers well-known locations and tourist attractions, all the way down to backyard operations. Under this bill, attractions like Marineland, an organization with a deeply concerning record of animal welfare practices and a string of animal deaths, would never have been able to continue operating. It represents a major shift towards protecting vulnerable animals and creating safer communities across Ontario.

Quotes

"Ontario has a troubling history of unregulated facilities keeping wild animals in unsafe and inhumane conditions. The Captive Wildlife Protection Act is a critical step to protect animals and safeguard our communities." – *Colin Saravanamuttoo, Executive Director, World Animal Protection*

"Keeping exotic wild animals in inadequate conditions is not only harmful to the animals but also dangerous for the public. Owning and caring for wild animals should be restricted to qualified individuals and organizations who are subject to proper government oversight. It is long past

time for Ontario to implement a regulatory framework for the keeping of wild animals in order to ensure the well-being of the animals and keep the public safe.." – *Lucille Collard, MPP for Ottawa-Vanier*

"The safety and well-being of both animals and people depend on these regulations. This act sends a clear message: substandard conditions and neglect have no place in Ontario. As a leader in wildlife conservation and education, the Toronto Zoo strongly supports these first steps to protect animals and communities alike." – *Dolf DeJong, CEO, Toronto Zoo*

Quick Facts

- Ontario has approximately 30 roadside zoos—more than any other province in Canada—operating without provincial regulation.
- 88% of Ontarians support provincial licensing and oversight of zoos.
- Nearly half of Ontario's municipalities have no bylaws governing the keeping of wild animals, leaving communities vulnerable to safety risks.
- Roadside zoos often house wild animals in substandard conditions, leading to psychological distress and safety risks for animals and visitors.
- There is no centralized registry in Ontario tracking where exotic animals are kept or how many exist in captivity, leaving communities vulnerable to unreported escapes and safety incidents.
- The Captive Wildlife Protection Act, 2024, brings Ontario in line with regulations in other provinces for the treatment of captive animals, setting a precedent for better welfare protections.
- This legislation is supported by leading animal welfare organizations, municipalities and cross-party members of the Ontario Legislature.

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About World Animal Protection

World Animal Protection is an international animal welfare charity with more than 70 years of experience advocating for the humane treatment of animals worldwide. In Canada, the organization works to protect wild and domestic animals through evidence-based solutions that benefit both animals and people.

About the Toronto Zoo

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's largest zoo, encompassing 287 hectares and home to over 3,000 animals representing more than 300 species. The Zoo is dedicated to connecting people, animals, and conservation science to fight extinction, with a mission to ensure wildlife and wild spaces thrive.

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