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Article

Do Formal Inspections Ensure that British Zoos Meet and Improve on Minimum Animal Welfare Standards?Chris Draper ^{1,2,*} , William Browne ³ and Stephen Harris ² ¹ Born Free Foundation, 3 Grove House, Foundry Lane, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 5PL, UK² School of Biological Sciences, University of Bristol, Woodland Road, Bristol, BS8 1UG, UK³ School of Veterinary Sciences, University of Bristol, Lower Langford, Bristol, BS40 5DU, UK

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Simple Summary: Key aims of the formal inspections of British zoos are to assess compliance with minimum standards of animal welfare and promote improvements in animal care and husbandry. We compared reports from two consecutive inspections of 136 British zoos to see whether these goals were being achieved. Most zoos did not meet all the minimum animal welfare standards and there was no clear evidence of improving levels of compliance with standards associated with the Zoo Licensing Act 1981. The current system of licensing and inspection does not ensure that British zoos meet and maintain, let alone exceed, the minimum animal welfare standards.

Abstract: We analysed two consecutive inspection reports for each of 136 British zoos made by government-appointed inspectors between 2005 and 2011 to assess how well British zoos were complying with minimum animal welfare standards; median interval between inspections was 1,107 days. There was no conclusive evidence for overall improvements in the levels of compliance by British zoos. Having the same zoo inspector at both inspections affected the outcome of an inspection; animal welfare criteria were more likely to be assessed as unchanged if the same inspector was present on both inspections. This, and erratic decisions as to whether a criterion applied to a particular zoo, suggest inconsistency in assessments between inspectors. Zoos that were members of a professional association (BIAZA) did not differ significantly from non-members in the overall number of criteria assessed as substandard at the second inspection but were more likely to meet the standards on both inspections and less likely to have criteria remaining substandard. Lack of consistency between inspectors, and the high proportion of zoos failing to meet minimum animal welfare standards nearly thirty years after the Zoo Licensing Act came into force, suggest that the current system of licensing and inspection is not meeting key objectives and requires revision.

Keywords: animal welfare; captive wild animals; enforcement; government inspections; improving standards; legislative oversight; local authority; Zoo Licensing Act

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