

# The HSUS Investigates: Natural Bridge Zoo in Natural Bridge, Virginia

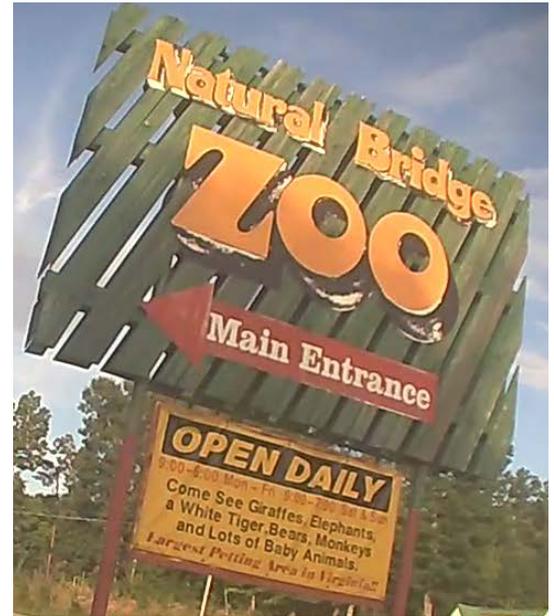


During the spring, summer and early fall of 2014, an HSUS investigator went undercover at the Natural Bridge Zoo (NBZ), a tawdry and troubled roadside zoo located in rural Natural Bridge, Virginia, and owned and operated by Karl and Debbie Mogensen. NBZ breeds and sells numerous exotic animals to the pet trade, individuals, other roadside zoos, at auctions and to canned hunt facilities. The Mogensens are affiliated with the Zoological Association of America, a small, deceptively named fringe group that accredits poorly run roadside zoos and supports indiscriminate and unhealthy breeding practices along with the exotic pet trade. Karl Mogensen's daughter, Gretchen, breeds tiger cubs for use in money-making photo shoots and private play sessions at NBZ. During our investigation, five tiger cubs were born and immediately taken from their mother, Bhuva. Two of the cubs, named Daxx and Deja, were kept by NBZ for a few months while their three siblings were sent to T.I.G.E.R.S., an exotic animal compound in South Carolina that engages in the same cub breeding that has caused an over-population problem and warehousing of these magnificent animals.

The video and photographic evidence gathered by the HSUS investigator demonstrates that Natural Bridge Zoo:

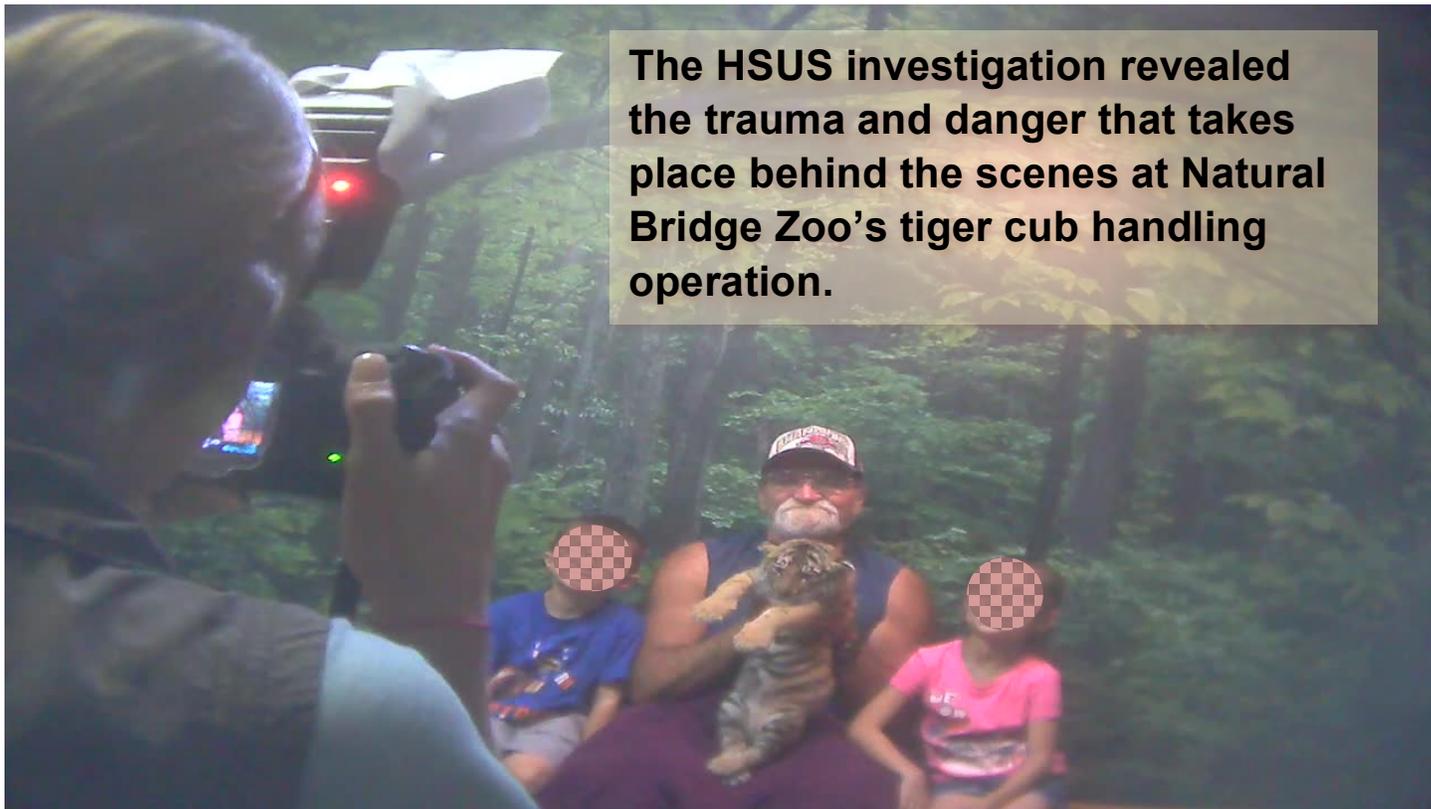
- Fails to provide adequate veterinary care to sick and injured animals
- Fails to safely and humanely handle animals, causing extreme distress
- Fails to provide animals wholesome, uncontaminated food and proper nutrition
- Fails to properly clean cages—maggots, algae and mushrooms were commonly found growing in filthy enclosures
- Fails to separate animals who are not compatible, resulting in fighting, injuries, illness and death
- Fails to provide clean drinking water or any water at all
- Fails to provide enrichment for the psychological well-being of primates
- Fails to control insect bird, and rodent infestations
- Fails to properly train staff and maintain an adequate number of staff

The HSUS has filed legal complaints requesting investigation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for violations of the federal Endangered Species Act, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for violations of state wildlife law and state and local authorities for cruelty to animals.



Trip Advisor reviews aptly describe what disgusted patrons have found during their visits to NBZ:

- “Size of the area the animals had was very poor. After entering the zoo I left 20 minutes later. It broke my heart to see how unhappy the animals were ...”
- “It was the worst zoo I have ever been to of the 20 or more I have visited around the U.S. ... and not a place to enjoy animals in anything remotely resembling their natural habitat.”
- “[Anyone] with a heart for animals should not visit this zoo. It will make you sad, angry and sick. ... The animals were going crazy in their cages, the pacing is bad.”
- “The tigers have no water and are forced to sit in the burning sun and pant all day. ... The giraffes’ hooves are so overgrown they can barely walk.”
- “We immediately felt terribly for the animals in the zoo’s care. The enclosures are in pathetic shape. The larger cats seemed miserable. One was pacing back and forth over and over mewing and whining.”



**The HSUS investigation revealed the trauma and danger that takes place behind the scenes at Natural Bridge Zoo’s tiger cub handling operation.**



Every moment of every day, the care of the cubs is secondary to the park’s ability to make money from them. Everything about their lives revolves around photo ops—when, how much and what they eat; when they defecate; when they sleep; when they play. Daxx and Deja, despite being tired, overheated, thirsty, hungry or not feeling well, were still required to sit still for a parade of customers paying \$50 per photo. NBZ also told the public that the money earned from these sessions would be used to improve living conditions for the zoo’s adult tigers—just one more falsehood to make sure the public does not question the ethics of using cubs as cash cows. Despite years of raising money from tiger cub photo ops, the adult tigers at NBZ do not even have a proper swimming pool or the ability for all tigers to access to the outdoors the same time, and they’re fed a cheap, nutritionally deficient diet.

Excessive hunger was required to keep cubs under control while being bottle-fed and handled by the public.	Tiger cubs were struck by Gretchen Mogensen and her husband when they engaged in normal cub behavior.	The cubs were never once seen by a veterinarian, despite being infected with parasites and suffering from diarrhea.	The public is told that the mother tiger rejected her cubs when, in fact, the mother was not allowed to care for them.
Tiger cubs experienced acute and chronic stress from being handled by up to 140 people daily.	Infants, toddlers and small children were allowed contact with tiger cubs.	The cubs were still used after they grew so large they became difficult for Mogensen to lift, let alone control.	The cubs were provided with improper diets that lacked essential protein.

# The miserable life of tiger cubs used for public handling

Public handling began when the cubs were only four weeks old. At this young age, cubs are especially vulnerable to illness because their immune systems are not yet developed. These cubs were also deprived of the benefit of maternal antibodies contained in mother's milk. These tigers continued to be used until they were more than 17 weeks old, weighed about 50 pounds and were considerably more dangerous.

The HSUS investigation revealed that food deprivation is a key element to facilitate public handling with tiger cubs. No matter how hungry the cubs were, bottle-feeding was delayed until one of three daily photo sessions began. The starving cubs drank voraciously from the bottle while seated in a customer's lap, but often only for a few seconds before the bottle was taken away until the next customer was seated. Between customers, the cubs would sometimes scream and struggle. Intermittent feeding greatly increased their stress and frustration.

To make matters worse, the bottle used during photo ops was fashioned with a modified nipple that had a tiny hole, barely allowing formula to trickle out. This prevented the cubs from becoming satiated too quickly, because excessive hunger was needed to control the cubs when they were handled by children and adults. As they grew older, meat was intentionally withheld on photo op days because meat filled them up and would prevent them from fixating on formula.

The investigator documented numerous instances when the tiger cubs were hit, smacked, punched, grabbed, scruffed or flicked on the nose while they were engaged in normal play behavior—starting when they were less than six weeks old.



Expert recommendations*	At Natural Bridge Zoo
Cubs should be raised by their mother because female tigers do a better job and parent-reared cubs are usually better adjusted behaviorally. Hand-rearing is done only as a last resort out of medical necessity.	Cubs are pulled from their mother during birth and hand-reared for the sole purpose of public handling.
Newborn cubs should receive a complete physical examination by a qualified veterinarian.	Cubs were never examined by a veterinarian, even when they suffered from chronic diarrhea and a fecal test revealed they were infected with coccidia and giardia.
Formula should never be microwaved because it destroys nutrients. Meat baby food should be added to formula starting at 12 days of age.	Formula was always microwaved, sometimes in the same bottle multiple times. Meat baby food was added to formula at six and a half weeks of age and stopped a few days later.
A nutritionally balanced commercial carnivore diet should be introduced at four and a half weeks of age.	The cubs were seven and a half weeks of age when they were offered their first taste of store-bought raw hamburger.
Hand-reared cubs should be fully weaned from formula by 12 weeks of age.	The cubs were still being used for photo ops at 17 weeks of age and being fed up to a gallon of formula a day rather than a proper carnivore diet.

Physical abuse was also used when the cubs squirmed and struggled while they were stimulated to defecate. Cubs should normally be stimulated after each feeding, but at Natural Bridge Zoo, cubs were stimulated to defecate as infrequently as every other day, causing them substantial discomfort.

\*Gail Hedberg, "Exotic Felids" (Chapter 27), *Hand-Rearing Wild and Domestic Mammals*, Blackwell Publishing, Iowa State University Press, 2002.

Laurie J. Gage, D.V.M., Dipl. ACZM, "Lions and Tigers and Servals, Oh My: Basic Medicine and Husbandry of Non Domestic Cats," white paper,

[docstoc.com/docs/88094620/Lions-and-Tigers-and-Servals-Oh-My-Basic-Medicine-and-Husbandry](http://docstoc.com/docs/88094620/Lions-and-Tigers-and-Servals-Oh-My-Basic-Medicine-and-Husbandry).

Gail Hedberg, "Best Practices For Hand-Rearing Lions (*Panthera leo*) and Tigers (*Panthera tigris* sp.)" presentation, U.S. Department Of Agriculture, APHIS, Center For Animal Welfare, Kansas City, Missouri, Lions, Tigers, and Bears Symposium, July 8 and 9, 2014.

Ronald Tilson, Ph.D., Declaration, HSUS et.al. "Petition for Rulemaking to Prohibit Public Contact with Big Cats, Bears, and Nonhuman Primates," October 16, 2012.



**This capuchin monkey, found dead by the investigator, was apparently poisoned by the careless placement of rat bait.**

**Virginia has NO laws on keeping primates**



**“... the monkeys like all hate [Debbie Mogensen] because she takes their babies, they don’t like her, they get upset when they’re around her because she takes their babies ...”**

—Becky, a keeper at Natural Bridge Zoo

NBZ breeds primates to sell to the pet trade and to other roadside zoos. The investigator documented heart-wrenching scenes of fiercely protective mothers with infants clinging to their backs fending off keepers chasing them around a cage with nets in order to snatch the babies. None of the primates were provided with adequate federally required environment enrichment. Fighting among primates kept in impoverished conditions was common, causing death and injury. Here are additional primate issues found during the investigation:

<p>A mandrill bled to death just hours after Debbie Mogensen observed, and then ignored, a fresh wound inflicted by a cage-mate.</p>	<p>Rather than separate incompatible monkeys, a DeBrazza monkey’s teeth were filed down with a rotary grinder to prevent him from inflicting bite wounds on other monkeys.</p>	<p>Gretchen Mogensen identified the macaques as one of the most dangerous animals in the park and described their enclosure as “not even remotely safe.”</p>
<p>A macaque, who was bullied by cage-mates, went weeks without being treated for a wound on his buttocks. When he was crated for shipment to another zoo, staff discovered he was bleeding heavily, his tail had been bitten off and the injury was so severe that the bone was exposed.</p>	<p>A female spider monkey caged with an aggressive male suffered a hand injury that was neglected for two weeks until the wound became badly infected and required that she be isolated, sedated and treated almost daily for more than a month.</p>	<p>A DeBrazza monkey kept in a small pet carrier after a severe hand injury was terrorized by staff who jabbed sticks through the pet carrier to provoke him to move, resulting in an additional injury to his mouth.</p>

## Dead, Sick and Injured Primates at Natural Bridge Zoo



At about 4:00 p.m. on August 30, 2014, Debbie Mogensen noticed that a male mandrill (pictured left on June 17, 2014) had been bitten by another male and was bleeding. She moved the injured male to an outdoor enclosure and left without bothering to see if the bite wound required treatment. More than three hours later, Gretchen Mogensen noticed that the injured male was lying on his side and there was blood all over the cage. His normally bright red nose was white. The normally blue parts of his face were pale gray. They realized he was dying and sedated him while he bled to death. His carcass was placed in the freezer (pictured right).



This DeBrazza monkey was only partially sedated and began struggling when Gretchen Mogensen took a grinder to his teeth.

Gretchen Mogensen suspected that hair loss in a group of white-faced capuchins was caused by fighting, but rather than seek veterinary care, she split up the monkeys by moving them into different cages with other capuchins. She later learned that the hair loss was apparently caused by skin mites. The capuchins were subjected to undue stress and may have spread a parasitic skin infection to other groupings because no veterinarian was consulted about the hair loss.



This spider monkey, who was apparently captured in Guatemala as an infant, was isolated in a barren cage in a filthy, cockroach-infested barn because an injury on her hand became badly infected (inset) after it was ignored for weeks. When it was finally treated, she was subjected to the stress of sedation, capture, restraint and wound treatment for more than a month. Despite being in severe pain, she was never once given painkillers.



This DeBrazza monkey sliced open his hand, apparently on a broken rusty pipe. He was violently jabbed with sticks to remove him from a pet carrier, sedated and restrained multiple times while his bandages were cut off with a dull scissors and replaced. During one treatment, he began jerking uncontrollably and appeared to have a fever, but no one took his temperature or called a veterinarian.

**A 24-year-old underweight pregnant giraffe, who never fully recovered from giving birth to twins in 2013 yet was bred again, was found dead. NBZ sells baby giraffes for up to \$60,000.**



Tori, a baby camel, suffered a traumatic death by hanging after her neck became wedged in a gap between the gate and the wall.



Leo, a lamb who was known by the Mogensens to be sick for a week but was never treated by a veterinarian, thrashed and writhed in pain for more than 40 minutes before he finally died.



Dead and dying guinea pigs were found almost daily in overheated, poorly ventilated and overcrowded metal tubs. Sick guinea pigs were killed by being slammed to the ground repeatedly.



NBZ installed an automatic waterer in the bear cage. But Debbie Mogensen insisted that it be turned off every night and the investigator observed that it was often left off during the day. There were numerous instances where the Asiatic black bears, who were kept in a concrete cage without adequate shade and without access to clean drinking water, were panting heavily. It was also common practice to feed the bears rotten, moldy produce.

## Other Vet Care Issues

- Debbie Mogensen, who is not a veterinarian or licensed vet tech, castrated peoples' pet goats in extremely unsanitary conditions and without sedation or pain killers.
- Muntjacs were dying from an unknown illness. They suffered hair loss and diarrhea and died within a few months without veterinary care.
- Animals were administered expired medications.
- The llamas had not been sheared in years and had heavily matted coats.

**Cages and safety barriers at NBZ are poorly designed, putting animals and the public at risk. Additionally, there are no safety protocols to protect staff from animal diseases or to address emergencies such as an attack or escape.**



A tiger is able to fit his paw through a gap in the enclosure.



In many cages, animals have an opportunity to escape every time their cage door opens.



Visitors are able to reach across inadequate safety barriers and touch capuchin monkeys and gibbons.



An untrained keeper is cleaning the macaque cage wearing only gloves and no face mask, eye shields or other protective gear, despite the danger of contracting the deadly Herpes B virus from macaques. At professionally run zoos, keepers wear biohazard safety suits when working around many primate species.