

Shirley apes chain-smokers

Picky orang utan begs for cigarettes but rejects certain brands

Starprobe

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

We believe it is your right to know. The investigative team at The Star welcomes information and leads. E-mail us at starprobe@thestar.com.my

PETALING JAYA: Shirley, an orang utan in a Johor zoo, is a smoker.

She begs for cigarettes in her solitary confinement, then puffs away when she obtains one.

The Star found cigarette stubs on the ledge between the grilles of her cage.

Some visitors tried to give her another stick when she finished her smoke but she seemed picky about her cigarettes because she rejected certain brands.

From previous online reports, it seemed that Shirley had long acquired this habit.

It is not known who introduced her to smoking.

No keeper, though, was on hand to stop visitors from handing her cigarettes.

There was also no signage warning visitors against doing so.

At another place, an African lion was placed in a small cage with only enough space for it to turn to the left or right.

Surprisingly, there were much bigger enclosures which were left unoccupied.

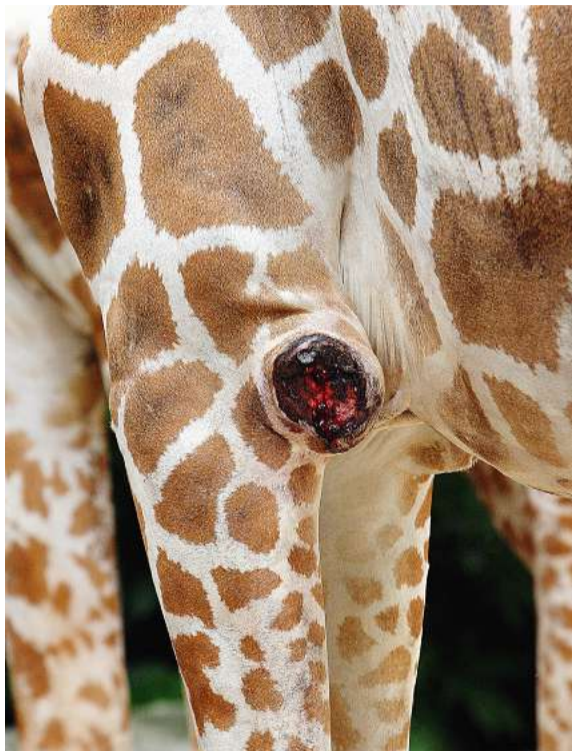
The lion had two wounds on its head and its skin and fur were in bad condition.

When a Singapore-based non-governmental organisation visited the zoo last year, the lion was found in that same cage.

In another case, a young sun bear in a wire-mesh cage was heard moaning incessantly.

Apparently, sun bears make this sound when they are in pain or distress.

At a zoo in Kedah, four crocodiles were placed in a concrete enclosure with no water to swim in.



Gaping problem: (From left) A giraffe with an exposed wound, a parakeet cycling for the crowd and tigers sleeping on cement ledges are just a few of the mistreated animals at Malaysian zoos. — Photos by ART CHEN / The Star



Wounded pride: A lion (above) finding it hard to move in an extremely small cage. It also has wounds on its head and a skin problem while (right) an elderly chimpanzee looks forlorn in its enclosure.



The 10 zoos - an overview

Zoo A in Johor Baru

INFORMATION is scarce and signages identifying the animals were mixed up. Some macaques were chained to a railing, which severely restricted their movements. There was a solitary wild boar in a bare cell. One could see vestiges of an old injury which made it limp.

Every enclosure was basically filthy. Most of the cages were damp which meant the animals would be prone to infections. Near the exit there was a tank filled with dirty water which contained an alligator-snapping tortoise.

Zoo B in Johor Baru

MOST of the animals were in small wire-mesh cages with no apparent drinking water. Birds like the parakeets were kept in similar-sized cages but they were also chained to bars which meant that they could not attempt to fly. An elephant was chained up. The tiger and lion were kept in a small enclosure.

There are animal shows on certain nights.

A macaque that was led by a chain was dressed up in a costume and walked on stilts. A parakeet was made to drag another parakeet in a miniature "rickshaw".

Zoo C in Johor Baru

BESIDES Shirley the orang utan, there were also some tigers and lions housed in pit-style concrete enclosures.

This zoo had previously been exposed for selling protected species of animals. The animals were seized in a raid conducted by Perhilitan.

Zoo A in Malacca

THE Brahminy kites were housed in an enclosure that was under 3m. These birds normally soar 20m to 50m in the sky. Among the herd of sheep, one had injured its hind leg and was limping.

Many of the ostriches were losing their feathers or had lost most of it.

Zoo B in Malacca

THE slow loris enclosure didn't give this shy nocturnal animals much respite from the light.

Tortoises of various species (including the Brown Asian Giant) were kept in a bare and dirty enclosure.

Zoo in Kedah

A Malayan sun bear was housed in a place where its faeces had not been removed. A small drain, which appeared to be its only source of drinking water, was stagnant and filthy.

Primates were housed in cages that were dirty and with limited space.

Overall conditions in the zoo are deplorable.

Zoo in Perak

AT the orang utan island, the animals seem well-cared for. The exception might be Mike, 29, the oldest orang utan. He was overweight and a guide explained

that each time visitors came, his caretaker would lure him closer to the cage tunnel with food.

Other zoos

THE three other zoos visited fared quite well, the best being the second largest zoo in Malaysia in Malacca. This zoo is spacious, clean and has well constructed enclosures and the animals looked well-kept.

Of concern was a zoo in the Klang Valley where the Big Ape centre was not as spacious as it should have been.

The clouded leopards enclosure was too small and no shelter was visible. An elephant could be seen chained and locked up in an enclosure while the other two elephants were allowed outside.

As for a zoo in Perak, it had failed to ensure a safe distance between the enclosures and visitors. This is evident at the area where the elephants, leopards, lions and zebras were kept.

In some cases, visitors could climb over the low railing and touch the animals.