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Museum Livestock Collections - Licensing or Exemption?

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Introduction

The implications of the Zoo Licensing Act, 1981, for Museums having live animal displays were discussed in a recent article by Gordon Reid (1984). The article was both informative and thorough in describing the way in which a museum should proceed in order to obtain a licence to operate as a zoo, and I am sure will prove most useful for future applicants. However, it was surprising to find that the concept of licence exemption for Museum live animal displays was dealt with in two paragraphs.

Having successfully negotiated an exemption for the live animal displays at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, under the terms of the Zoo Licensing Act, 1981, Section 14, (and found it a relatively painless process!) the author feels that this approach may well be worthy of consideration by other Museums.

Criteria for licence exemption

Although these criteria are very loosely stated, and totally unquantified within Section 14 of the Act, the main grounds for applying for exemption would be based on size of collection, scope of collection, or a combination of both factors.

Collection size

Few, if any, museums in Britain have collections which can be considered as large when compared to the majority of British zoos. Certainly the majority of museum live animal displays in this country could be described as small when considering the spirit of the 1981 Act.

Collection scope

Whilst most zoos aim to show representative specimens covering many families of animals, particularly birds and mammals, Museum displays are normally far less comprehensive, the majority of specimens being lower vertebrates, stick insects or arachnids. Thus, again, it would seem there should be a reasonable argument for most museum live animal displays to be eligible for exemption.

Although not mentioned in section 14 of the Zoo Licensing Act, discussions with the Department of the Environment's representative led to the author to understand that zoo licence exemptions would not be granted to institutions possessing animals scheduled under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1981, or animals included on the Endangered Species ; "Import and Export" listings.

Once again, most museums do not exhibit animals affected by these legislative controls, and could therefore be considered eligible for consideration.

Case history of licence exemption at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry

Following discussions with Coventry City Council's Legal Division and a representative from the Environmental Health Services Department, it was decided to apply for exemption from licencing.

A veterinary inspection was carried out by the veterinary officer normally used by Coventry City Council for inspection of Pet Shops, etc. The visit lasted perhaps an hour and a half, during which time I was questioned closely on the requirements of the animals in my care and the food and treatment that they received. It should be pointed out here that the veterinarian undertaking the inspection did not belong to the practice used by the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum for animal treatment. During the course of this discussion the author was informed that provided the terrapin pool was made fully inaccessible to the public (it was at that time "open-plan") the vet would be prepared to recommend the collection as worthy of consideration for exemption from the Zoo Licensing Act. This visit occurred on 5th October 1984.

Following receipt of the veterinary report, the Environmental Health Services Department sent off an application for licence exemption for consideration by the Secretary of State.

In due course the author had a phone call from a D.O.E. representative, who "didn't think we would get exemption on the grounds that he thought our terrapins were endangered species". (Table 1). When challenged, he admitted that he didn't actually know if any of the species listed were endangered, but that "some of them might be". Interestingly enough, no mention was made of the Mexican Indigo snakes (Drymarchon corais erebennus) despite the fact that the Florida subspecies (Drymarchon corais couperi) is protected. Certainly no-one bothered to examine the specimens in order to ascertain that they were indeed the subspecies that I claimed them to be, nor was the author asked how he decided that they were one particular subspecies rather than another.

I must confess that I found this apparent lack of knowledge and concern on the part of the D.O.E. disconcerting.

In late October 1984, the author was advised by the D.O.E. that the outcome of the licence exemption application would not be decided prior to the Act coming into force, and that I should therefore apply for a full licence in the meantime. This request was complied with.

On November 29th 1984 the Secretary of State's representative granted full exemption from the Zoo Licensing Act, for the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry.

Table 1
Livestock at Herbert Art Gallery and Museum when applying for exemption under Section 14 of Zoo Licensing Act

Reptiles
Chelonia

<u>No.</u>	<u>Common Name</u>	<u>Species and sub-species</u> <u>(where relevant)</u>
1	Spiny soft-shell turtle	<u>Trionyx spinifer</u>
1	Snapping turtle	<u>Chelydra serpentina</u>
1	Thai pond turtle	<u>Chinemys sp</u>
8	Red-eared terrapins	<u>Chrysemys scripta elegans</u>

Squamata-Lacertilia (Sauria)

2	Water Monitors (juvenile)	<u>Varanus salvator</u>
2	Spiny-tailed Iguanas	<u>Ctenosaura hemilopha</u>
4	Basilisk	<u>Basiliscus basiliscus</u>
15	Green Anoles	<u>Anolis carolinensis</u>

Amphibia

Anura

2	Marsh frogs	<u>Rana ridibunda</u>
8	Oriental fire-bellied toads	<u>Bombina orientalis</u>
5	Thai tree frogs	<u>Rhacophorus maculatus</u>
20	Green tree frogs	<u>Hyla cinerea</u>

Caudata

8	Fire bellied newts	<u>Cynops pyrrhogaster</u>
10	Spotted Salamanders	<u>Ambystoma maculata</u>
3	Axolotls	<u>Ambystoma mexicanum</u>
1	Fire Salamander	<u>Salamandra salamandra</u>

Fish

Many	guppies	<u>Lebistes reticulatus</u>
1	Reedfish	<u>Calamichthys calabaricus</u>
3	Mozambique Mouthbrooder	<u>Sarotherdon mossambica</u>
3	Convict Cichlid	<u>Cichloasoma nigrofasciatum</u>
2	"Upside-down" Catfish	<u>Synodontis sp</u>
1	Black Triggerfish	<u>Odonus niger</u>
1	Lionfish	<u>Pterois volitans</u>
1	Lipstick Tang	<u>Naso lituratus</u>

Limitations of possessing Zoo Licensing Exemption

Inability for Museum to keep endangered species and animals scheduled under the listings of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act.

Since most museums' live animal displays, unfortunately, are maintained by Natural History staff who have other curatorial duties within the Museum, I feel that there is little justification for keeping dangerous or venomous animals in museum live animal displays. The fact that the author has a deep personal interest in snakes, and would be prepared to maintain venomous species in captivity providing that they were adequately housed, does not mean that successors to his post would share his delight in keeping such creatures! There is a moral duty on the part of those maintaining museum live animal displays, as part of a curatorial role, to attempt to keep only specimens that would survive the husbandry of someone with limited expertise, so that changes in staff do not cause major problems with live animal displays.

Similarly, most animals in museum live animal displays are there to demonstrate a particular adaptation, or as a representative species of a geographical area, therefore there is seldom any need to use species which are known to be endangered. Such species would be better maintained in captivity by full-time animal husbandry specialists.

I would wish to stress that the views expressed in the last two paragraphs are aimed at Museums not employing a full-time specialist whose responsibilities lie solely in maintaining a live animal display. Where such a specialist exists, the staff could be expected to have the experience



The 'tropical house' at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum

to deal with dangerous species if necessary, and the knowledge and husbandry skills required for attempting to breed from endangered species. Furthermore their collections would tend to be of a size which would automatically preclude the possibility of applying for exemption.

Advantages of possessing Zoo Licensing Exemption

The main advantage which the small museum can derive from being exempt from zoo licensing is financial. The costs of inspection for the purposes of licensing are not cheap - during informal discussions I have had with a local authority employee and a private herpetological exhibitor it transpired that the cost of the inspection prior to licensing was in the region of £1500 in each case. Exemption, on the other hand, was very cheap to obtain. Furthermore, re-licensing is necessary after four years in the first instance, six years thereafter. Since there is no reference to it in the Act, one can assume that exemption applies in perpetuity providing that the scale and scope of operation does not change, and that local authority instigated inspections do not reveal cause for concern.

It is likely that for small operations, some of the standards demanded of zoos could be slackened slightly in the case of exempted displays. For example, it may not be deemed necessary to possess a separate room for food preparation purposes, providing a specific area can be set apart to be used exclusively for such a purpose within an existing room. However, any such slackening of standards must be seen as being strictly related to the scale of the operation, and all livestock displays, however small, should strive to meet the standards set down by the Secretary of State.

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