

U.S. Zoos Aid War-Ravaged Counterpart in Kabul

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Friday, November 30, 2001; Page A16

A coalition of American zoos has pledged to raise thousands of dollars as part of an international effort to help Afghanistan's Kabul Zoo, whose miserable conditions have worsened markedly in recent weeks.

Once a modern facility, the zoo has been ravaged by years of war. Its only lion is blind in one eye from a hand grenade. Its Afghan bear has an open sore on its nose, reportedly caused by visitors smacking it with sticks. Half of the zoo's cages are empty, some of them because the animals were killed for food.

Lately, the situation has deteriorated, according to press reports. The zoo's small staff has not been paid since July. The keepers scrounge food for the animals or pay for it themselves. With winter nearing at the unheated facility, keepers reportedly brought caged songbirds suffering from the cold into their own rooms at night.

This week, a group of U.S. zoos announced that it would join an international effort to raise \$30,000 to operate the facility for six months and then would try to implement a long-term plan to rebuild it. The zoos also hope to offer veterinary help and supplies.

"As urgent as the need is for humanitarian aid, there is also the need to help animals that have been suffering during these times," said David M. Jones, director of the North Carolina Zoo, which is collecting donations.

Jones, who has contacts in Pakistan through his work with an animal hospital there, is coordinating fundraising for the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, which has promised to raise \$10,000.

By mid-afternoon yesterday, the association had raised about \$9,000 from zoos and individual contributors, said Rod Hackney, a North Carolina Zoo spokesman. Funds raised beyond the initial goal will pay for long-term rebuilding.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals has delivered \$3,000, which was raised by a London newspaper, Hackney said. He said European zoos will send a veterinary team to Kabul as soon as conditions are safe.

The National Zoo in Washington intends to make a contribution, as yet undetermined, to the Kabul Zoo effort, spokesman Mike Morgan said yesterday.

Hackney said State Department officials¹ have offered to help make arrangements to deliver supplies or evacuate animals. "We're not looking at removing those animals," he said, "given the commitment those keepers have shown so far."

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¹ Coordinated by Larry Roeder, Policy Adviser on Disaster Management, Office of Social and Humanitarian Affairs, Bureau of International Organization Affairs, US Department of State