



March 15, 2010

A zoo employee is suspended as a mischievous gorilla perches on his perimeter fence

An experienced zoo keeper has been suspended for failing to properly secure the gorillas' outdoor habitat early this morning.

At approximately 8:15 a.m. before the zoo was open to the public, two young gorillas (Shana and Zola) were in their outdoor habitat. Shana, a 7-year-old male, took a leap from a pile of ice that had accumulated in the moat that borders the gorilla yard. He managed to reach, and perch upon the glass perimeter screen before seeing a member of staff and leaping safely back into his yard.

A zoo employee spotted Shana perched on the glass, but when Shana, who is shy and relatively small (weighing 125 pounds) saw the staff person, he immediately leapt back safely into his yard. The keepers were alerted and Shana was brought indoors. A team of four people began work on the ice removal shortly after 10 a.m. and by noon all ice had been removed from the moat.

Cathy Gaviller, Director of Conservation and Research explained, "It looks like the ice that had accumulated in the moat allowed the mischievous Shana to leap up and grip the top of the glass perimeter screen, where he perched for a few minutes before jumping back safely into his yard."

"There was no danger to the public as the zoo hadn't yet opened; therefore our first concern was for the safety of our gorillas and staff. The gorillas were brought indoors immediately and the ice in the moat was removed. We are confident this has eliminated the risk of this happening again, but we are considering installing additional precautionary safety measures," Gaviller continued.

As recently as six weeks ago the Calgary Zoo's curators met with staff to emphasise the necessity to check animal habitats – both inside and out, thoroughly each day.

There are many examples around the world of gorilla's escaping their habitats, but having cared for 15 gorillas in Destination Africa since it opened in January 2003, this is the first time one has reached its boundary at the Calgary Zoo.

Gaviller commented "Never before has one of our gorillas managed to perch on its perimeter screen. When temperatures rise above 5 Celsius our gorillas have access to their outside yard which is surrounded by a perimeter wall that's a minimum of 12 feet tall, which meets or exceeds the height standard of 12 feet. In addition, there is a moat area which presents an additional buffer between the gorillas and perimeter screen."

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