

## Few animal attractions pass wildlife group's test

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### Document Text

An international wildlife group has found many of Florida's zoos and animal attractions lacking in safety, habitat and conservation efforts.

Chimps throwing their feces at visitors. Elephants shaking their heads endlessly. Bears pacing the same small pattern over and over. Animals kept alone in stark cages.

"Children don't see wild animals, they see crazy animals," said Neil Trent, regional director for the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

At a news conference Tuesday, Trent's group delivered copies of a study done earlier this year of 21 zoos, attractions and roadside animal parks throughout Florida.

Veterinarian and zoo inspector John Gripper visited the sites as a tourist and found only two businesses that would pass British zoo standards: Busch Gardens in Tampa and Jungle Larry's Zoological Park in Naples.

Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa was not reviewed for the study, but Trent said it is accredited and has a good standing with a national zoo accreditation group. Sea World in Orlando received both positive and negative remarks, but Gripper concluded he did not spend enough time at the park to determine whether it would have passed the British standard.

Two Tampa Bay attractions that earned poor marks with Trent's group were Noell's Ark Chimp Farm in Tarpon Springs and Wildlife on Easy Street in the Citrus Park area of northwest Hillsborough County.

Trent called Wildlife on Easy Street little more than an elaborate showroom for owners trying to sell bobcat and cougar kittens.

"It smells of exploitation the moment you walk in," he said.

Don and Carole Lewis keep more than 100 felines and other animals at their home on 40 acres off Sheldon Road near Gunn Highway. Although it is not regularly open to the public, visitors can tour the grounds by appointment on Saturdays.

The protection society's report criticized the Lewis' for empty cages that lacked "environmental enrichment," such as grasses and plants, and for having too many of the animals too close together, causing anxiety and stress.

In addition, the report found safety lacking at Easy Street, so much that, "there is a very real risk of injury to the visiting public" and "a strong likelihood of an escape of a large cat into the neighborhood."

Carole Lewis challenged the report's concerns about safety. She said the tiger fence is 9 feet tall, not 6, and that they are not making any profit from sales of non-endangered animals.

The Tarpon Springs chimp farm opened more than 25 years ago and evolved into a refuge for unwanted chimps, gorillas and orangutans. But within recent years it was in disrepair and shut down temporarily by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1993.

The more than three dozen primates at the chimp farm mostly live in single, small cages, the report said, and are not allowed to interact in natural social groups.

Last year, the owner began turning the operation over to a trust and a non-profit corporation with plans to upgrade the facility.

### Illustration

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, TONY LOPEZ; Caption: (1995) a lynx in a cage

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### Abstract (Document Summary)

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