

**Andrzej Kruszewicz, PhD**

is an ornithologist and explorer, and the author of many publications. He is the founder and honorary member of the Warsaw Society for the Protection of Birds. He also presents a radio show about the environment.

# LIVING LIKE EMPERORS

**W**e talk to **Dr. Andrzej Kruszewicz**, director of Warsaw Zoo, about animals being held in "captivity."

## ANIMAL FREEDOM

**ACADEMIA: Zoos tend to be controversial. Some people claim that animals are harmed by being kept in captivity and that they should be released, while others counter that they wouldn't survive the dangers of the wild.**

ANDRZEJ KRUSZEWICZ: The concept of freedom is as subjective as that of happiness. Freedom means different things to different people. For example, opponents of zoos claim that wild elephants cover many kilometers every day while their zoo enclosures are just a few hectares. This is true, but wild elephants travel long distances to fulfil their basic needs – to find water and food. They walk because they have to. Zoo enclosures are large enough to ensure the animals get enough exercise, but there is nothing forcing them to travel. This is especially clear in predators: in the wild they have to keep moving to search for prey. Sated lions and tigers happily sleep 16 hours per day, just like domestic cats.

That's a good example, actually. If an indoor cat suddenly finds itself outside, it's faced with a new world: there are scents marking other cats' territories, and that's an uncomfortable situation. The idea of freedom is a utopian one – wild animals can't wander wherever they wish either.

And of course humans aren't entirely free – do we go into other people's gardens because they are pretty, or enter their houses because we fancy a nap? The animal world is also divided by different kinds of barriers, impermeable to certain creatures. There are private zones and neutral zones. Watering holes are the closest to being fully neutral, but even so there could be predators lying in wait.

I think of it the way I think of my passport. When I was young, we had to queue for hours for a passport each time we wanted to leave the country. I used to think back then that if I could keep my passport at home, I would travel all the time. And now? The passport is sitting in a drawer and I don't go dashing abroad because I haven't got the time or the money.

**What would you say to those people who believe zoos are animal equivalents of prisons?**

I'd say that zoo animals are more like emperors living in castles than prisoners in cells. They have dedicated keepers monitoring their health, checking what they like and don't like eating, thinking how to make them more comfortable. And it's often the case that people who have opinions about animal freedom live in tiny high-rise flats with three kids, a huge dog, a cat and an aquarium. They seem to be perfectly OK with their own limited freedom.

**Are zoo animals ever likely to be released?**

Of course they are, and this already happens. The Przewalski horse was returned to the wild thanks to the species being revived at zoos. There are con-

servation efforts to reintroduce several bird species, such as the Socorro dove, the Bali myna and the Edwards's pheasant. In some cases reintroduction is prevented by the political situation in the animal's native region; an example is the Somali wild ass.

**How does reintroduction work in species with complex behaviors, for example birds which need to learn how to avoid predators from their mothers?**

Dr. Andrzej Krzywiński from the Wild Animal Park in Kadzidłów has developed a mother-assisted rearing and release technique known as "born to be free." Capercaillie mothers and chicks are kept in an aviary, which has holes too small for the adults to get through. The chicks are able to go outside where they learn independence skills such as avoiding predators.

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**Intelligent species require more than just meeting their basic physiological needs, otherwise they simply get bored. How do zoos solve this?**

The wellbeing of animals is underpinned by five essential needs: freedom from hunger, psychological damage, illness and stress, and freedom to meet their social needs. The latter means they need to be able to interact and play with other animals. You can't keep intelligent animals in a zoo without caring for them intelligently. We have chimpanzees and gorillas, brown and polar bears. We have entire teams of people dedicated to keeping them occupied. I used to require the polar bear keepers to submit daily reports on how to prevent their charges from getting bored. The bear enclosure is secured at night and the animals have a free run of it, while during the day we keep them busy with special training. Other species are also given training regimes: seals are taught to swim to a target held by a keeper on the opposite

side of the pool. It provides a distraction for the animals, and it can also have practical applications since it gives keepers the opportunity to perform medical checks, administer medicine and so on.

Chimps are given plastic bottles filled with fruit juice, and since the bottles, empty and discarded, make the enclosure messy, we have taught them to tidy up after themselves – so they bring the bottles back to their keeper in exchange for a snack. We also teach them to allow their keepers to pinch their rear ends. This is especially important because it eliminates problems when the animals need to be given an injection – they are used to the minor discomfort and they know they will be rewarded immediately.

to the new place. The presence of a familiar person is extremely important since it provides a sense of security.

#### **Do groups of intelligent animals develop individual animosities? How can this be solved in the limited space of a zoo?**

Sometimes there is no other option but to remove a troublesome individual, but we always keep a close eye on the situation. We had a problem when our flock of flamingos wasn't breeding. It turned out that there were too many males in the flock, and two of them got into a habit of breaking up couples. Once the meddlesome individuals were separated, everything returned to normal.

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#### **Are those behaviors typical of a given species?**

There is no need to teach animals completely new behaviors since we can make the most of their natural habits. We put fresh herbs into the polar bear enclosure every morning to give them some new smells to explore. Before gorillas and chimpanzees are let out into their enclosure, we hide different items for them to find during the day. Of course this only makes sense for species which naturally search for food. When one of our camels molted, we packed the shedded hair into a sack and put it in a predator enclosure to give the animals something to play with.

When we were recruiting keepers for our chimps, one of the job requirements was good English. The press mocked us at the time, but it really is an essential skill – our employees frequently attend courses abroad where they learn the latest developments in care for individual species. They also accompany animals sent to other zoos. Being moved is highly stressful for the animals, so the keepers stay with their charges for a while until the animals get used

#### **What happens to separated individuals? Are they kept in isolation?**

Social animals are never kept in isolation. They can be moved to a different group where the hierarchy will be restructured or built from scratch. With our flamingos, we changed the structure of the flock by introducing more females.

#### **Are new animals introduced to a group ever not accepted?**

When we wanted to introduce a breeding pair of chimpanzees, Patrick and Kimberly, to our existing troop of seven animals, it was a nerve-wracking experience. We started by introducing Patrick and Kimberly, and we were incredibly relieved to see them greet each other with hugs and kisses. It turned out they had spent time together in the same laboratory in the UK when they were youngsters, so they were delighted to be reunited. But how were we going to introduce the couple to the rest of the troop? We started by forming small coalitions: we introduced Patrick to one of our chimps and Kimberly

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to another. Once they were familiar with each other, we introduced another individual. We brought the groups together gradually, and eventually Patrick and Kimberly were able to mate successfully. Chimpanzees look after their young collectively, so all individuals within the troop must tolerate one another.

### Correct interpretation of animal behavior is a real art.

That's right, and our visitors frequently misunderstand what they see. When an adult gorilla runs after a youngster, they might think that the young animal is in danger, but in fact the two are playing chase and their roles are soon reversed. We've also been accused of mistreating our bears, because someone filmed an individual pacing back and forth in its enclosure. In fact this was just before feeding time and the animal was getting impatient watching its keeper preparing food, but the bystander interpreted it as stereotyped movement.

### So education of visitors is important.

The trouble is that people rarely read information panels. We used to have a white-tailed eagle living at the zoo since the 1970s. One of its wings had been amputated after the bird was shot. This wouldn't have been done today since it makes it difficult for the eagle to maintain balance, but things were different back then. The bird had an aviary near the entrance to the zoo, and since it couldn't fly, the perches were low down at a height suitable for hopping. I kept receiving complaints via the city mayor that we are mistreating the eagle – our national symbol, no least! – because it didn't have anywhere higher to sit. The story of the injured bird was described at a plaque next to the aviary, but many people preferred to lodge a complaint instead of simply reading it. We do try to educate, but some people can be hard to reach.

### Have visitors changed since you've been managing the zoo?

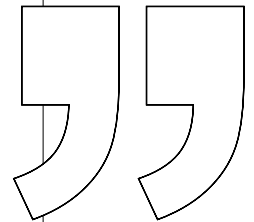
Definitely. When we first opened our bird refuge, people used to bring in young magpies or jackdaws learning to fly. Fledglings can often be spotted sitting on the ground and they're too clumsy to escape, so they may appear to be sick or abandoned. Our campaign, mainly targeting children and teenagers, was successful in shifting this perception. We explained that if the bird has no visible wounds and is able to stand up by itself, it should be left alone. Our partnership with the ecopatrol in the city is also working well – patrol officers called to intervene are often able to explain that supposedly sick animals are fine and should be left alone. Even zoo visitors are better behaved and we now rarely have instances of people

teasing monkeys – something which used to be very common. I occasionally joke in the media, suggesting more people visit us in bad weather because our monkeys get bored and they need entertainment.

### How do zoo animals respond to visitors?

They know the boundaries of their territories, but they are alert. It's enough for someone to swing their leg over a barrier to trigger a tragedy. Unfortunately this happens sometimes; recently at Wrocław zoo a tiger killed a zookeeper, although it was due to human error. The gates weren't closed properly, and the animal found itself in an enclosed space with the keeper. The attack was a fully understandable kind of territorial behavior. The fault was on the human side, which is why the tiger wasn't put down. Bar-

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riers and cages aren't just there to protect humans; they also protect the animals. Animals know that visitors can't cross those barriers, which makes them calm and comfortable. Unfortunately people don't always respect these divisions.

### So we are reaching the conclusion that the limit of individual freedom is the freedom of another individual, and it doesn't matter whether the other individual is even of the same species.

That's exactly right. We must respect boundaries, both in our own human society and in the animal world. If we cross them, we must be aware of potential consequences, for example by crossing into a territory of a predator. Animals have their own paths marked with scent; they have hiding places and they generally don't wander beyond the boundaries because they don't know what lies beyond. As I said earlier, freedom is a utopian concept both in the human and animal worlds.

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