



WWF's Position on the Mortality of a Chimpanzee at Karachi Zoo

August 2023

WWF-Pakistan remains deeply concerned about the distressing and ongoing loss of threatened wild animals within zoos, particularly the Karachi Zoo, due to inadequate capacity, poor husbandry and negligence. Zoos play a crucial role in education, conservation, and research, but the recent incident of a chimpanzee's death raises urgent alarm about the need for reform and the institutionalization of heightened standards. The incident undermines the fundamental principles of animal welfare and conservation that zoos should uphold.

After the tragic death of elephant Noor Jehan at the Karachi Zoo, the Sindh government constituted a Task Force in April 2023. The Task Force, which WWF-Pakistan is a part of, visited the Karachi Zoo and Safari park, identified several areas of concern for animals, and furnished its recommendations. During the visit, the Task Force observed that the chimpanzee enclosure was small, full of darts, lacked enrichment, and needed better housekeeping.

Chimpanzees, which are endangered due to poaching and illegal trade and habitat loss, are highly intelligent and social animals like humans and share approximately 98 per cent of their DNA with us. Their intellectual abilities, emotional depth, and complex social structures make them one of our closest living relatives. Our zoos have been failing to care for intelligent and social animals like chimpanzees and elephants and these species have been dying in our zoos. In 2014, four chimpanzees, all from the same family, died at Lahore Zoo where they were kept in small cages and a barren environment.

In the wild, Chimpanzees exhibit multifaceted behaviors such as tool use, communication, and problem-solving. However, the challenges of maintaining such complex animals within the confines of a zoo environment are numerous and require careful consideration. One of the most significant contributors to chimpanzee deaths in zoos is the provision of substandard enclosures and limited space. Adapted to vast territories and rich ecosystems in the wild, chimpanzees can suffer tremendously when confined to small, sterile cages or enclosures that lack proper enrichment. Stress, boredom, and even aggression can arise from the frustration of being unable to engage in natural behaviors. The removal of individuals from established groups can lead to social disruption, loneliness, and severe psychological distress. Such conditions can weaken immune systems and leave these animals vulnerable to diseases, which can ultimately lead to their demise.

Captive chimpanzees are also prone to stress-related health issues, which can worsen when compounded by inadequate care. Untreated ailments and improper diets can lead to cascading health problems that shorten their lifespans.

The upsetting death of a young chimpanzee at Karachi Zoo, and the past mortalities of other endangered species, raises ethical and moral questions about the treatment of these intelligent and sentient beings. We need to put a halt to this and urge the Government to take this up urgently.

WWF strongly believes that animals held in zoos should be cared for according to the highest husbandry standards- in compliance with national, regional and local legislation and adhering to the provisions of the Code of Ethics and Animal Welfare of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. WWF also urges governments, particularly the Government of Sindh, and the administration of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation to carefully evaluate the dismal conditions at the zoos in Sindh and make well-informed decisions about their future viability.

WWF wants to veer focus to improving the management of these establishments and building adequate human resources. It is crucial that Pakistan forms zoo legislation and standards and establishes an independent authority to monitor the implementation of these standards, while ensuring the closure of those establishments with substandard facilities. It also urges the establishment of zoo management committees, independent bank accounts for zoos to promote financial sustainability, and the training and capacity building of zoo staff.

Towards this end, WWF-Pakistan stands ready to bring in the required expertise and collaborate with zoos, governments, and other stakeholders to drive positive change and ensure a brighter and safer future for all species.