

Zoo 'urged' to cancel 'Zoo Nights'

✘ The animal welfare organisation People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has written to the Chief Executive of Edinburgh Zoo asking that they cancel their popular Zoo Nights.

The campaigners say that the partygoers at the events create a loud stressful environment for the animals on display.

PETA Director Mimi Bekhechi said : "Putting animals at risk for the sake of making a few pounds should make the public question Edinburgh Zoo's priorities. PETA are calling on Edinburgh Zoo to do what's best for the animals – and that means cancelling the stressful 'Zoo Nights' events."

A spokesperson for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland said:

"Edinburgh Zoo Nights visitors have never shown behaviour of this nature, which we totally concur is unacceptable. Although alcohol is available in moderation, there is absolutely not a 'drunken' atmosphere. The events, of which there are only four, are planned in conjunction with our animal experts. Our keepers are very careful to monitor our animals' behaviour at any evening event and these events are tailor-made to ensure there is no disturbance to them, with all entertainers and bars situated away from animal enclosures, even our disco is a silent one. Simply put, there is no one that cares more about the animals in our care than our keeping staff. The animals can also enjoy the added stimulus of visitors to the park with enrichment activities, evening feeds and later access outside in some cases. We would like to reassure you that we are confident that there are no welfare complications and the animals are always our priority.

“As a charity that receives no public funding we rely on gate attendance, events and sponsorship for our resources to care for animals and manage conservation, research and education programmes. This does mean exploring ways to increase our income in a world with escalating conservation challenges. We are also very much about education and Edinburgh Zoo Nights is very popular with younger people who enjoy being at the Zoo and are fascinated by the animals and engaged with keepers and other staff about our work.”

The letter reads:

12 March 2015

Dear Dr West,

I am writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) UK – one of the biggest animal-protection charities in the country – as well as our hundreds of thousands of UK supporters to ask that you abandon your plans to host “Zoo Nights” at Edinburgh Zoo. During similar evening events held at London Zoo recently, members of the public were apparently able to disturb the animals and were reported to have crushed butterflies on the ground. It was reported that a person tried to pour beer on a tiger and that another person undressed before attempting to enter the penguin enclosure.

Scientific research shows that during normal opening hours, the presence of zoo visitors can have a detrimental impact on the animals’ welfare. “Zoo Nights”, which take place outside normal opening hours, while animals would normally be resting, are likely to have an even greater negative impact on animal welfare, particularly if the visitors behave in a manner that stresses the animals.

Zoos are responsible for the safety of the animals in their

care, and they must make that a priority. Allowing these late-night events – in which visitors will be permitted to consume alcohol in a “relaxed atmosphere” and enjoy other after-hours entertainment to “kick start” their Friday nights – does not demonstrate adequate consideration for animal welfare, as it puts profits before the animals’ well-being.

We urge Edinburgh Zoo to cancel “Zoo Nights”. We’re keen to hear back from you on this important issue. I can be contacted at KirstyH@peta.org.uk or on 0207 837 6327, extension 227.

Kind regards,

Image courtesy of Edinburgh Zoo Ivon Bartholomew