

Edinburgh Zoo may reopen by end of June

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland says it will be ready to reopen Edinburgh Zoo by the end of June if lockdown eases further.

The society has warned that being closed over the summer months could be “financially disastrous”.

A wide range of safety measures to protect visitors and staff is being put in place by the wildlife conservation charity, which has had to borrow £5 million due to the coronavirus pandemic and the closure of both parks.

Chief Executive David Field, who joined RZSS from the Zoological Society of East Anglia this week, said, “We are talking to the Scottish Government and hope we can reopen within the next few weeks if Scotland moves into the next phase of lockdown and outdoor attractions can open again.

“Concerns have been raised by zoos in England which have been told the earliest they can reopen is in July, even though private gardens have already opened.

“Edinburgh Zoo and Highland Wildlife Park have large outdoor spaces and we can reopen safely by introducing social distancing, closing indoor areas, limiting visitor numbers and selling tickets online with time slots.

“Zoos with these covid-secure restrictions will be just as safe as private gardens and far safer than a crowded beach or public park.

“The many educational, physical and mental health benefits of visiting zoos and enjoying nature are also well known, which is why zoos in Europe have been among the first places to reopen.”

Field revealed the pandemic has already caused heavy financial losses for RZSS.

“Almost all our income comes from our visitors and around sixty-five percent from April to August,” he said.

“We have furloughed staff and our generous supporters have raised funds to help feed our animals but we have still had to borrow £5 million.

“The UK government has stepped in to help smaller zoos protect animal welfare through the zoo emergency fund but unfortunately RZSS and other large, charitable zoos are not eligible to apply for this support.

“Repaying our multi-million pound loans will have a significant impact on our parks and our globally important conservation activities.

“If we cannot reopen soon then we will need to borrow even more, which could be financially disastrous.

“When this crisis is over, connecting with nature and being close to animals is going to be more important than ever, which is why it is vital that our parks open again and we can recover to continue our science, education and conservation work.”

To donate please go to rzss.org.uk/help



Edinburgh Zoo. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com