

The HSUS Investigates: Tiger Safari in Tuttle, Oklahoma



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES



During the spring, summer and early fall of 2014, an HSUS investigator went undercover at Tiger Safari, a roadside zoo located in Tuttle, Oklahoma, that is owned and operated by Bill Meadows. The HSUS investigator recorded cruel treatment of tiger cubs exploited for photographic opportunities, indiscriminate breeding of tigers and numerous other issues at the facility.

As the facility's name implies, at Tiger Safari, the focus is on tigers. The facility heavily promotes the opportunity for members of the public to engage in photo and play sessions with baby tigers—for a hefty fee, of course. When tiger cubs are born, Bill Meadows instantly separates them from their mothers and sends them on a long road that begins

with perpetual handling and harsh discipline for their natural resistance to such activities. After just a few months, the journey ends with these magnificent animals being caged for the remainder of their lives—often in substandard facilities all over the country—while more cubs are produced to be used as the next set of photo props. The HSUS has filed legal complaints, supported by video evidence, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation regarding our findings during the 2014 tiger cub handling investigation.

Maximus and Sarabi

A coworker tearfully told the HSUS investigator about a mother tiger who cried for days after her four cubs were taken from her “before they even hit the ground” in late April 2014. A white cub from that litter—eventually named Maximus—was kept by Tiger Safari for public handling events and became the focus of the HSUS investigation. During the investigation, Bill Meadows also acquired a tiger cub named Sarabi from an exotic animal compound in South Carolina.



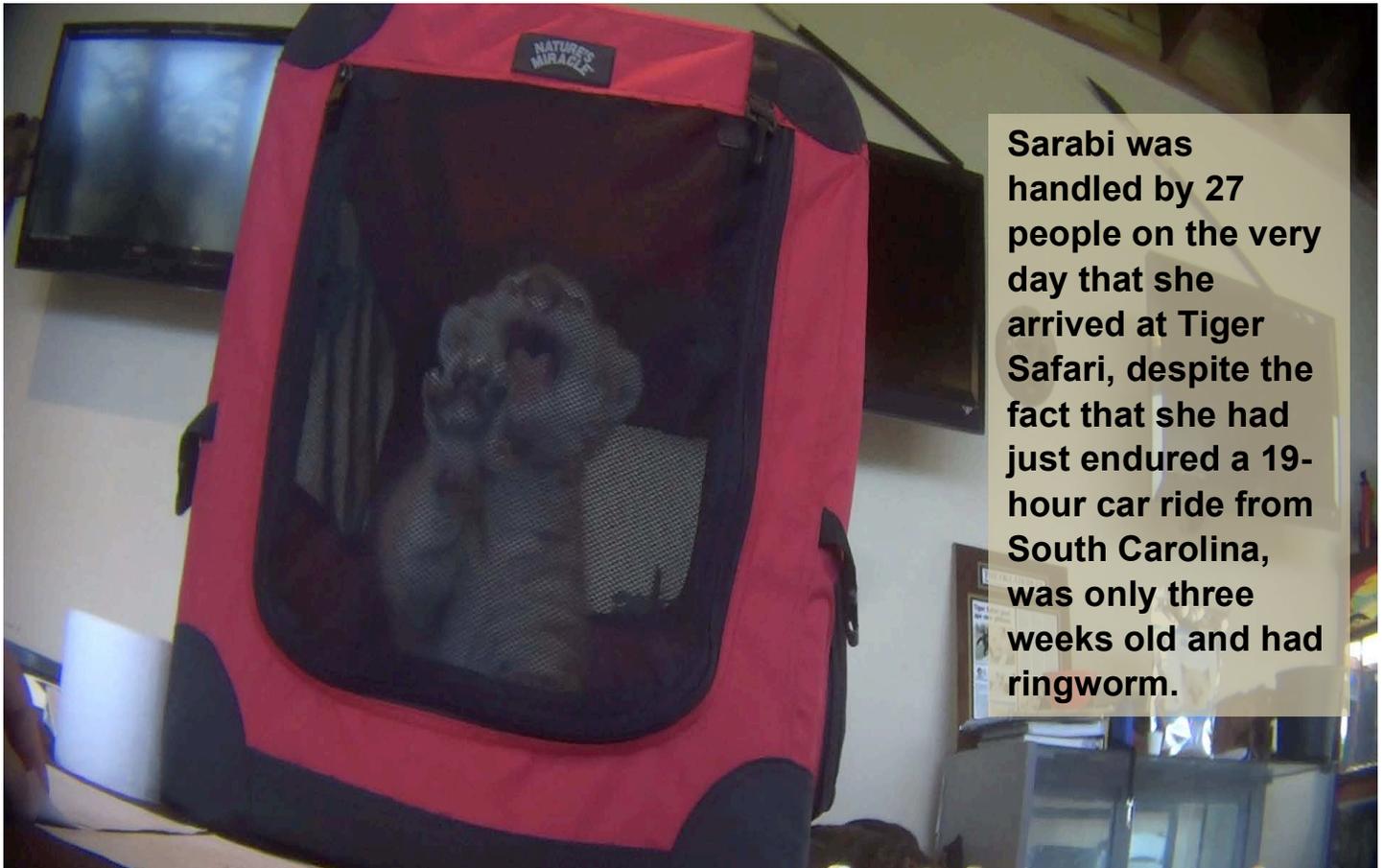
Bill Meadows began subjecting Maximus and Sarabi to public handling when the cubs were just three weeks of age. Both tiger cubs were mercilessly

over-handled, were frequently awakened just to be handled and often screamed in distress as they were passed around for entertainment.

Tiger Safari and the tiger cub trade

Shortly after they were born, Maximus's three littermates were sent to T.I.G.E.R.S. (The Institute of Greatly Endangered and Rare Species) in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, a shady facility operated by exhibitor Kevin Antle, who has a long history of breeding and selling exotic animals and who warehouses big cats at his compound. Antle has built a large and very profitable business by charging the public exorbitant prices for tours and photos with young animals. Antle is a prolific tiger breeder and many big cats are stored at his facility or dumped at other substandard facilities when they outgrow their usefulness. The HSUS investigator accompanied Bill Meadows to T.I.G.E.R.S. and received a behind-the-scenes tour, witnessing dozens of adult tigers who were kept in cement horse stalls in a dark barn.

In addition to Maximus's littermates, four other tiger cubs who were born at Tiger Safari during the investigation were also transferred to Antle's facility within days of their birth. Some of those cubs were reportedly destined to be used as photo props during the holiday season at Antle's location in Florida.



Sarabi was handled by 27 people on the very day that she arrived at Tiger Safari, despite the fact that she had just endured a 19-hour car ride from South Carolina, was only three weeks old and had ringworm.

As he grew, Maximus was physically disciplined and manhandled by Bill Meadows, his niece Lauren and other staff when he would not cooperate for photo shoots. He was punched, slapped, dragged, choked, suspended by his legs and tail and tossed into his cage and onto the laps of patrons. Sarabi was also slapped and punched in an effort to train her not to bite.



Neither Sarabi nor Maximus received timely veterinary care for ringworm, a fungal infection of the skin that can be transmitted to people and other animals. Sarabi arrived at Tiger Safari from Antle's South Carolina compound already infected with ringworm, which Maximus also soon contracted, yet the cubs did not receive any treatment for the fungus until more than a month later.

“You take that fist and you punch him right in the nose as hard as you can.”

--Bill Meadows instructing his niece Lauren to discipline tiger cubs

Bill Meadows failed to feed Maximus properly, and he disregarded his veterinarian's advice about the cub's diet even when the vet expressed concern about malnutrition causing improper development of Maximus's leg bones. Meadows told The HSUS investigator, "That's bullshit...she has never raised a tiger. I always say 'yes ma'am' and do my own shit."

Metabolic bone disease, caused by a nutritionally deficient diet, is a common ailment of privately owned, hand-reared tiger cubs.



Both tiger cubs were housed inappropriately. Maximus was kept in a human infant playpen until he was more than nine weeks old. The cloth floor of the pen did not provide the cub with a solid resting or walking surface; even at a very young age, his weight caused the floor of the pen to sag to the ground beneath it. When the HSUS investigator expressed concern, Meadows told the investigator to put the playpen behind the counter, saying, "What the public can't see, they can't complain about." Sarabi was kept in a dark and cluttered interior room with no stimulation or companionship.

Both cubs experienced obvious distress when Meadows subjected them to an unnatural position he called the "sleeper hold." Holding the cub in the air with one hand, Meadows tipped the infant onto his back and balanced him there until the cub stopped struggling and went limp.



A solitary and elderly capuchin monkey named Emmett spent seven weeks in a filthy bird cage in a dimly lit apartment on Tiger Safari's property.



The cage Emmett was kept in was barren except for two plastic toys and a filthy towel. Emmett lacked the companionship of another monkey that is so crucial to any primate's psychological wellbeing. There was no perch in the cage and Emmett often clung to the food and water bowls attached to the side of the cage in order to avoid sitting on the uncomfortable metal bars on the cage floor. The pan under his cage was cleaned so infrequently that it contained moldy feces.

Kangaroos Henry and Rascal

Henry and Rascal, two young kangaroos who were also used for photo ops at Tiger Safari, were kept in a dimly lit room cluttered with items that had the potential to cause them harm. When the HSUS investigator informed Bill Meadows that both kangaroos were eating wallboard and wood trim in the room, Meadows simply issued instructions to put chairs in front of the chewed wallboard and towels over the woodwork in an unsuccessful attempt to deter the kangaroos from ingesting the potentially toxic materials. When staff told Meadows that Henry was sick, they were ignored. Henry was not seen by a veterinarian until days later, at which point it was too late: Henry died of "septic shock." Meadows took no measures to have the surviving kangaroo, Rascal, examined by the veterinarian, nor did he disinfect the room after Henry died.

Many other animals suffered and died at Tiger Safari

- Meadows hesitated to spend money on veterinary care and usually waited until animals were in imminent danger of losing their lives before calling in the veterinarian.
- Meadows failed to provide appropriate training to staff—the investigator was put in charge of the tiger cub Maximus after only one week on the job. Meadows continually complained to the investigator that the other workers were incompetent and called them "misfits."
- Meadows failed to provide proper vet care to an infant deer in dire need of medical attention who was left on an office couch while Meadows took money from customers for tiger cub photos. The fawn died several hours later.
- Filthy cages, lack of water and food and cages that could not be cleaned inside due to a lack of lock-out areas were common at Tiger Safari.
- Meadows falsified records and lied to USDA inspectors about the deaths of a deer (gored to death by a cage-mate), kangaroo (a 9-month-old who died of "septic shock" several days after the investigator and other staff told Meadows that he was sick) and a chinchilla (whose death was not recorded but who was simply replaced by purchasing another chinchilla at a local pet store).
- Animals were transported to off-site events (birthday parties, corporate events, etc.) in a rickety van that had to be started with pliers and had inadequate air conditioning. A snake nearly died after being left in the stifling van overnight and a rat died of heat exhaustion after staff neglected to remove him from the van.

A Sorry History of Non-Compliance with Federal Law



Bill Meadows has a long history of poor animal care. He has received two official warnings (in May 2014 and September 2012) from the USDA and has been repeatedly cited by the agency for serious violations, including:

- Failure to provide veterinary care to a tiger cub who had ringworm, a tiger who had had a mass at the base of his tail and a camel who had lesions on his neck
- Failure to provide sufficient heat to primates in freezing temperatures
- Failure to provide adequate enrichment to primates, including six primates who were housed alone
- Inadequate public safety barriers around big cat and bear cages
- Multiple enclosures that were hazardous to the animals
- Rodent infestation
- Filthy cages
- Transport of two gibbons in interstate commerce without the requisite health certificates

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE ANIMAL AND PLANT HEALTH INSPECTION SERVICE



VIOLATOR: William Meadows, Tiger Safari, Inc.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has evidence that ... you or your organization committed the following violation(s) of Federal Regulations:

- 2.75(b)(1) Records
- 2.131(c)(1) Handling of animals, safety barriers.
- 3.75(a) Housing facilities, general, structure: construction, primates.
- 3.76(a) Indoor housing facilities, heating, cooling, and temperature, primates.
- 3.76(c) Indoor housing facilities, lighting, primates.
- 3.77(a) Sheltered housing facilities, heating, cooling, and temperature, primates.
- 3.81(a) Psychological well-being, social grouping, primates.
- 3.81(b) Psychological well-being, environmental enrichment, primates.
- 3.84(d) Cleaning, sanitization, housekeeping and pest control, primates.
- 3.125(a) Facilities, general, structural strength.
- 3.125(c) Food and bedding storage.
- 3.127(b) Facilities, outdoor, shelter.
- 3.127(c) Facilities, outdoor, drainage.
- 3.127(d) Facilities, outdoor, perimeter fence.
- 3.131(a) Sanitation, cleaning of enclosures.
- 3.131(d) Sanitation, pest control.