

Accredited Zoo Best-Practice: Example Animal Escape Protocol for a Zoo, (from Chapter Emergency Readiness and Crisis Management of the book ZOOKEEPING).

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This Zoo protocol prescribes policy, responsibilities and procedures in the event of an animal escape.

Animal Escape Code. The zoo's "Escape Code" is a radio code that signifies that an animal is out of its primary enclosure. A zoo's code may be based on a color ("Code Red"), an event ("Code Lemur" or "Code 99"), or may just be stated in plain English as in "I am reporting an Animal Escape of [species, number of animals or identity individual] at [location]"

Person-in-Exhibit Code. This Code signifies that a human (unauthorized visitor or intruder, or staff member) is in an animal enclosure and is at risk from the animals within the exhibit or animal is at risk from the person, and may some a modification of the Escape Code.

Recapture supervisor. Most often, this will be the curator of the unit from which the animal escaped. If the unit curator is unavailable, the area's senior keeper (most familiar with the animal) on the scene acts as recapture supervisor until another animal supervisor arrives. That supervisor then acts as the "Recapture Supervisor", working closely with the keeper(s) most familiar with the escaped animal. In the event of an escape of an animal in the Animal Hospital, the veterinarian or veterinary technician on duty shall serve as recapture supervisor.

Refer to the following documents as needed

Zoo Emergency Contact List, Contact Numbers for Animal Emergencies, Staff Emergency Telephone List, and other contact numbers located in Crisis Notebooks of senior staff. (e.g. need notifications of director, supervisors, etc)

The Zoo's POLICY is that the appropriate radio "Code" shall be called for any animal escape or person-in-exhibit incident.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Senior Supervisor for Animal Care department

Establishes and implements the policies, procedures and responsibilities relating to animal escapes.

Ensures that this zoo directive is reviewed annually with each keeper and all supervisors of zoo departments, police and the Zoo's support organization. Each new staff member shall be given a copy of this directive during orientation.

Ensures that the Animal Care Staff Emergency Telephone List is current and available to the appropriate zoo staff and police.

Recapture Supervisor

Primarily responsible for requesting the appropriate level of response, with the level of response

dependent upon the species and individual animal, its location (e.g., outside its primary holding area but secondarily confined or approaching the perimeter fence), time of day, and proximity to visitors.

Maintains control of all radio transmissions and direct employees during the event.

May designate another individual to assist with event logistics, including perimeter control and liaising with staff not directly involved with the recapture.

Veterinarian

Ensures that the veterinary staff maintains an animal escape protocol directed at equipment readiness, which shall be posted for hospital staff and revised annually. This protocol shall include anesthetic dosages for all species considered potentially dangerous at the zoo.

Ensures that drugs and drug delivery systems suitable for recapture are available to the veterinary staff, and that the veterinarians are trained for their use in escapes. The contact numbers for Veterinary Emergencies Telephone List is current and available to the appropriate animal staff, veterinary staff, and police.

Assists the recapture supervisor as necessary. When chemical immobilization is required, works with the recapture supervisor.

In some cases (e.g., absence of appropriate curator or keeper, animal escape from the hospital or quarantine), assumes the role of recapture supervisor.

Police Department or Security team (some zoos have their own security team, others work directly with police departments).

Ensures that these procedures are reviewed annually with each member of the security staff.

Ensures that each new officer shall be given a copy of this directive and that the contact lists cited above are available to the security supervisor in case of an escape at night.

Ensures that suitable caliber weapons and ammunition are available to the security team, and security officers or curatorial and animal care staff are trained and qualified to use them to kill escaped animals.

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Animal care (keeper) staff

Discusses passive containment strategies for their unit(s), and make sure that their staff are familiar with methods and techniques that allow an animal to return to its home enclosure after an escape through behavioral management. For instance, a graded response can be attempted via passive opening of gates to allow animal to return on its own, baiting the animal with food, negative reinforcement by keepers ("herding" non-dangerous animals), veterinary use of tranquilizer darts, and finally destruction of a dangerous animal to protect human life.

DISCOVERY AND NOTIFICATION

Broadcasting the discovery

The person who discovers an escaped animal shall attempt to keep the escaped animal under observation from a safe distance. Announcements of escaped animal shall occur as follows:

Announce "(Appropriate) Code" on the radio to alert all zoo staff of the situation (the initial announcement shall be made on the zoo's Animal Department radio channel if the zoo has multiple channels)

Information to be conveyed

The first person to spot the escaped animal (whether a keeper or not) in the initial escape code radio announcement should state:

- Name of the caller
- The escape phrase "Code (___)"
- The best description of the animal including species, age, sex, number of animals (if more than one)
- The specific location of the animal and any direction it may be heading
- If medical attention is needed
- The level of response requested (if known).

The first keeper or animal care supervisor responding to this call should confirm by repeating the transmission.

Actions by recapture supervisor

The recapture supervisor should then announce the escaped animal over the radio and request immediate perimeter gate closure if necessary. They should then request any necessary assistance from keeper staff, veterinarians, police, facilities staff and health unit staff. The recapture supervisor should request that both the veterinarians and the police be contacted by telephone if immediate assistance is required. Recapture supervisors, or their designee, should contact the zoo director to apprise them of the situation.

Response team

The following employees shall respond to the "code" as requested by the recapture supervisor (to keep the escape scene as clear and unencumbered as possible, employees should not report unless requested): Keepers/animal care staff/supervisors; veterinary staff; police; health unit; facilities staff.

"Escape Code" contact tree

The Director's office shall notify, as necessary, zoo personnel using the telephone numbers cited in the contact lists above. It is also best practice to include public affairs staff.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS BY KEEPERS

The discoverer of the escaped animal should keep it under observation and not attempt to recapture it.

The on-scene senior animal keeper, with knowledge of the animal, is the recapture supervisor until the arrival of the unit curator or manager, who shall assume the role of recapture supervisor. All keepers from the escaped animal's area should report to the scene but approach cautiously and listen for directions from the recapture supervisor.

No attempt should be made to capture the animal until the recapture supervisor initiates a plan. Nets, gloves, or other capture equipment should remain hidden at this time because they might scare an animal into a fight or flight response.

Excess and unrelated radio traffic must be avoided. Once the recapture supervisor is in place, he/she shall control the radio traffic and may repeat the following: "A(n) (Escape Code) has been announced, so radio traffic is restricted. No persons may send or acknowledge radio traffic on the Code channel except those involved in the Code action."

After the initial radio announcements, the zoo's senior officer on-duty shall re-broadcast the restriction announcement as needed.

All other animal care supervisors should report to the scene but stay at a safe distance unless and until needed.

All other keepers should await instructions and report to the scene only if requested by the recapture supervisor. They may be asked to form a perimeter or otherwise assist in the recapture. Nets, gloves or other capture equipment must remain hidden until requested by the recapture supervisor.

The initial goal is to establish a wide perimeter around the escaped animal to try to contain it while a recovery plan is being formulated, and to keep people safely away. Others may be involved in supervising evacuations of visitors, etc.

Recapture supervisor

- Direct keepers by radio in establishing the perimeter and requesting police assistance as necessary;
- Crowd control - advise other zoo supervisors to keep visitors and non-involved zoo staff at a safe distance (inside buildings if necessary);
- Close zoo perimeter gates by instructing other supervisors to have the gates closed if necessary

(this should be done for any escaped carnivore or large primate);

- Choose a keeper with a radio to assist the veterinarian in carrying equipment during the recapture effort;
- Formulate a recapture plan and communicate details of that plan as necessary; request additional staff and recapture equipment as needed;
- Delegate any of the above actions (logistics related to staff and visitors) to another staff member in order to focus directly on the recapture effort;
- Call off the "code" when the animal is recaptured and secured.

Keeper/animal supervisor

The escaped animal's unit should immediately implement a passive containment plan to allow the escaped animal to return on its own to a home enclosure and/or to prepare an enclosure for the escaped animal after it is recovered;

If the escaped animal is outside the secondary containment, and poses a risk of entering another animal enclosure, appropriate keepers should immediately try to shift inside all bears, big cats, wolves, apes or other dangerous animals;

The primary enclosure from which the animal escaped must be checked for breaches, and cage mates (if any) should be counted and secured;

At the direction of the recapture supervisor, keepers on the scene should begin to establish a perimeter. There should be no premature attempt to recapture the animal, and no nets, gloves, or other capture equipment should be visible to the animal unless directed by the recapture supervisor;

In the case of a dangerous escaped animal (e.g. bear, big cat, ape, or large monkey), only keepers and supervisors with radios should initially help form the perimeter. In some instances this response must be made in vehicles affording protection to the responders. The perimeter should be well beyond the animal's flight distance. Other zoo staff may be asked to help form the perimeter;

once the perimeter is established, the recapture supervisor may direct the keepers to adjust the perimeter to allow or encourage the animal to return to its home enclosure on its own. The animal should not be approached closely, and there should be no waving, shouting or running that might alarm the animal.

Veterinary staff

Veterinarians shall respond as quickly as possible if they judge they are needed, or as requested by the recapture supervisor. If capture or immobilizing equipment is needed, the veterinary staff shall assemble the equipment and transport it to the scene. The veterinarian(s) shall work with the recapture supervisor to capture the animal.

In case of night-time escapes, available security officers or building engineers should help to safely monitor the animal's location until appropriate curators, keepers and veterinarians arrive.

AFTER RECAPTURE

All staff shall remain on stand-by in alert status until the stand-down order is given.

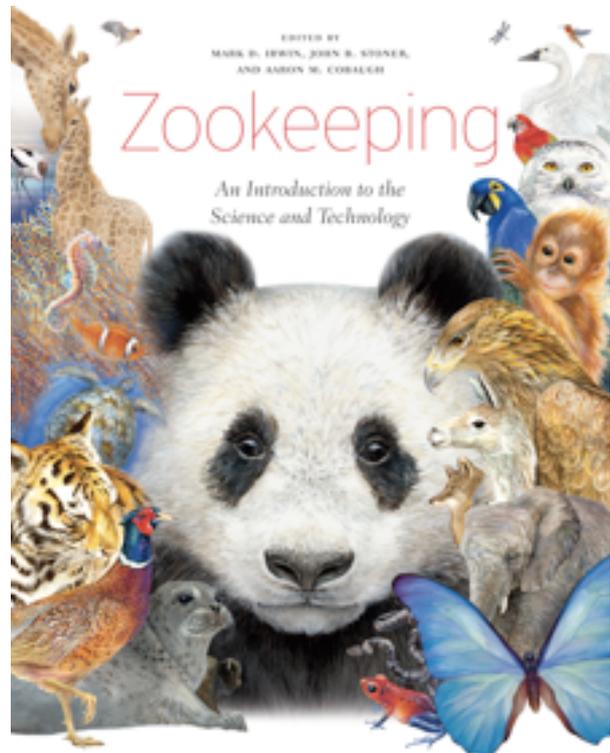
When the escaped animal has been recaptured AND secured, the recapture supervisor shall give a direct stand-down command (e.g., "[Escape Code] is now called off, all staff stand down"), upon which the gates may be opened and the public may be allowed to use the zoo grounds.

The Recapture supervisor shall make an immediate verbal report to the Director, and assist in preparing a statement for the media, if necessary.

The recapture supervisor will request a debriefing of all staff involved immediately after the event. The recapture supervisor shall provide a written report of the incident to the Director within 48 hours.

How to Order

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Mark Irwin, John Stoner and Aaron M. Cobough are the creators and editors of Zookeeping, an Introduction to the Science and Technology.