

# The Covino Family

SeaQuest (multiple locations), San Antonio Aquarium, and Austin Aquarium

Members of the Covino family—namely brothers Vince and Ammon—have been involved in opening a number of aquariums nationwide, including the following:

- **2021—Houston Interactive Aquarium & Animal Preserve (Houston Interactive Aquarium) in Texas**
- **2016—SeaQuest, first location, with multiple locations following**
- **2014—San Antonio Aquarium in Texas**
- **2013—Austin Aquarium in Texas**
- **2012—Portland Aquarium in Oregon (closed in 2016)**
- **2011—Idaho Aquarium (Covino involvement ended in 2014. It is currently operating as Aquarium of Boise.)**

Since the first Covino aquarium opened, hundreds of animals have died either at the facilities or during transport, including over 200 in a three-month period at the now-defunct Portland Aquarium. A total of 250 trout died in transport to SeaQuest Littleton in Colorado. In addition, dozens of people have reported injuries sustained by direct contact with wildlife at multiple SeaQuest locations.

Ammon Covino was sentenced in federal court to more than a year in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit illegal wildlife trafficking in 2013. He was sent back to prison twice in 2016 after violating his parole—which prohibited any activity involving the exhibition, purchase, or sale of fish or wildlife. Despite being legally prohibited from

doing so, Ammon was involved with the operations of the aquariums in Portland, Austin, and San Antonio (for which he was sent back to prison in February 2016). Then he was involved in the opening of SeaQuest aquariums in Utah and Nevada (for which he went back to prison again in November 2016).

Documentation is available upon request.

**March 3, 2022/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** The USDA issued the Austin Aquarium a citation for failing to notify the attending veterinarian of abnormal behavior exhibited by two young otters. During the inspection, Scooter, a male otter, “was observed constantly sucking his right front foot. His foot remained in his mouth even when he was walking in the exhibit.” Sadie, a female otter, “was observed repetitively running in a circle around one area of the exhibit. She tossed her head as she moved. This behavior stopped only briefly before it started again.” The animal care manager stated that Scooter had always exhibited this behavior. She also stated that Sadie’s stereotypic behavior began several weeks before the inspection, after the facility started to allow public feeding throughout the day.

**February 24, 2022/Houston Interactive Aquarium, Houston, Texas:** The USDA issued the Houston Interactive Aquarium a critical citation for failing to provide a young male giraffe with wholesome and palatable food of sufficient quantity and nutritive value to keep him healthy. Since the giraffe’s arrival, he “was fed 3-5 pounds of produce (potatoes, carrots, cucumbers, kale, and apples), rye crackers along with free choice alfalfa hay and approximately 4 pounds of herbivore pellets.” Staff and members of the public would feed him romaine lettuce throughout the day. The inspector noted that records indicated that the giraffe didn’t

consume all the pellets offered each day and wasn't provided with additional browse once he ate what was growing in his enclosure. About a month after arriving at the facility, he developed a "life-threatening neurological condition which veterinary records indicate was diet related. A diet consisting of large amounts of produce with little browse and roughage is not an adequate diet for a giraffe and may result in health problems and death." A critical citation was also issued for failing to have employees who were "knowledgeable about adequate nutrition" for the giraffe who became ill. "Not only was the animal not fed a proper diet for the species, but also measures were not taken when the employees saw he was not consuming adequate amounts of various types of feed to avoid any nutrition-related health problems. As a result, the animal nearly expired one month after his arrival. Adequately trained employees are vital to the overall health and well-being of the animals, as these animals can suffer deleterious effects, and possibly death, if acceptable levels of husbandry are not maintained."

The USDA issued the facility a direct citation for failing to handle a 12-year-old lemur properly to protect him from the weather. The inspector observed that the lemur was shivering for minutes at a time on several occasions in a new outdoor enclosure that had no heat source. The ambient temperature outside was about 33 degrees, and the ground temperature inside the enclosure was about 52 degrees. A citation was also issued for failing to provide him and a 2-year-old female lemur with adequate housing facilities. The female lemur was housed in a new, separate outdoor enclosure that also had no heat source. The attending veterinarian confirmed that she had not approved exclusively housing the lemurs outdoors in such low temperatures or determined that

the lemurs were acclimated to those temperatures. A citation was issued for failing to provide a female capybara with adequate housing facilities. The current shelter "allowed heat to escape and had an air draft into it, through the many gaps between the single layer of wooden floor planks. There also was no bedding on the floor of the shelter." Another citation was issued for failing to have adequate supervision during a kangaroo encounter. During inspection, there were 10 people in the enclosure with three kangaroos and only one attendant. Children were observed interacting with the kangaroos while the attendant was busy with another animal.

**February 24, 2022/SeaQuest, Trumbull Connecticut:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to properly handle a kinkajou who scratched the face of a young child during an encounter. Two children and a staff member were in the enclosure with the kinkajou at the time of the incident.

A citation was also issued for failing to keep the African crested porcupine's enclosure in good repair: The wooden doorframe was chewed, and splintering wood posed a risk to the animal's safety. Another citation was issued for failing to properly clean the wall between the Bengal cat and kinkajou enclosures. The kinkajou enclosure had previously been part of the aviary, and there was an accumulation of feathers and birdseed between the wooden frame and plexiglass between the two enclosures.

**January 13, 2022/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** The USDA cited the Austin Aquarium for failing to adequately clean the pool inside the capybara enclosure. The water was cloudy and brown/yellow in color with fecal matter floating around, and there was a buildup of brown material at the bottom of the pool.

**December 13, 2021/SeaQuest, Layton, Utah:** The USDA issued SeaQuest a repeat critical citation for two separate incidents. The first took place on September 28, 2021, when a guest was bitten by a kinkajou. Security footage showed that the guest and a child were attempting to interact with the kinkajou and were not observed or stopped by an employee.

The second incident occurred on November 13, 2021, when Chip, a small-clawed otter, bit the thumb of a guest during an interaction session.

**November 30, 2021/SeaQuest, Woodbridge, New Jersey:** The USDA issued SeaQuest a critical citation for an incident on June 24, 2021, in which an employee shut a secondary door on a flying squirrel. After an encounter, the employee escorted a member of the public out of the enclosure into a vestibule. When the employee shut the secondary door, the flying squirrel tried to escape and was caught in it. The squirrel died at the time of the incident.

**November 11, 2021/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Honey, a 2-year-old kinkajou, was quarantined for 10 days after biting an employee.

**November 1, 2021/SeaQuest, Roseville, Minnesota:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have a readily identifiable attendant present at all times during public contact with animals. An area housing two pigs, two wallabies, and two rabbits lacked public barriers and allowed contact between animals and the public without an attendant present.

**October 12, 2021/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA issued SeaQuest a repeat citation for failing to maintain an animal enclosure in good repair. The facility had not adequately applied caulking to the

baseboards of the Bengal cat off-exhibit holding area. The caulking was easily pulled away from the wall, which was an ingestion health hazard for the cats. The area underneath the caulking was also dirty, indicating that it was not doing its intended job of sealing the area from water and dirt.

**October 8, 2021/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife issued SeaQuest a criminal citation for unlawfully purchasing and possessing a snapping turtle. The business was also issued five warnings for illegally possessing Russian tortoises, a painted turtle, a yellow-bellied slider, and an ocellated skink. On November 18, 2021, SeaQuest pleaded guilty to illegally purchasing the snapping turtle and was fined \$250.

**August 4, 2021/SeaQuest, Folsom, California:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to use materials that can be readily cleaned and sanitized in the construction of the concrete entryway, vertical wooden supports, and surfaces of a climbing tree in the Bengal cats' enclosure. All the aforementioned surfaces were unsealed.

**July 22, 2021/SeaQuest, Trumbull, Connecticut:** During a focused inspection, the USDA cited SeaQuest for housing two rabbits in the same primary enclosure with another species (a potbellied pig) and for failing to maintain the wallaby enclosure properly. The walls of the wallaby enclosure were constructed of fake rock and bamboo slats, and in at least four areas, there were gaps between the bamboo slats that were large enough to allow visitors to gain access to the animal or for the animal to escape.

**July 13, 2021/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have a responsible, knowledgeable, and readily identifiable employee present during all times of public contact with animals. During the inspection,

a visitor was observed reaching over the enclosure fence and petting a capybara without an attendant present.

**June 22, 2021/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA issued a repeat citation to SeaQuest for failing to have attendants present during possible interactions between animals and the public at the facility. Two rabbits and an armadillo were within easy reach of the public in enclosures with 2-foot-tall fences and no barriers, and no employee was present to monitor the encounter. The USDA also issued a repeat citation to SeaQuest for failing to maintain the Bengal cat enclosure in good repair. Two of the walls in the off-exhibit area were constructed of sheetrock, which the USDA noted was not an appropriate material for animal enclosures, as it can be easily scratched and cannot be adequately cleaned or disinfected. The sheetrock had large areas where the outer paper was torn off, and there was a large hole in it at floor level. The wood around the door into the exhibit was stained and gouged and could not be adequately cleaned. The wire mesh separating the cats from the public had a hole with exposed sharp edges that posed a risk of injury to the cats.

**June 3, 2021/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The USDA issued a critical repeat citation to SeaQuest for failing to provide a means for a wallaby named Ben to climb out of an aquarium tank safely at the back of his enclosure. As a result, he drowned. The incident happened after the facility closed for the evening on September 16, 2020, and Ben was found dead in the tank the next morning. While the wallabies had access to the aquarium tank, at the time, it had no climbing structures on the inside to allow an animal to climb out safely.

SeaQuest also received a citation for failing to store food and bedding in a manner that would protect it from contamination,

deterioration, and mold. An open bag and another, ripped bag of bedding were in the main guest area, to which the public had access. In the food preparation area, there was an open bag of Timothy biscuits for the two guinea pigs that wasn't stored appropriately to protect it from deterioration and contamination.

**May 24, 2021/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** The USDA cited the Austin Aquarium for failing to maintain the flooring in the animal quarantine room in good repair. There were pitted and eroded areas on the surface of the flooring that needed to be repaired or replaced. An enclosure with two miniature pigs was in the room at the time of the inspection, and debris was accumulating in the eroded area of the floor, making sanitation difficult.

**April 15, 2021/SeaQuest, Folsom, California:** According to a Facebook review with photos, a toddler's hand was badly bitten by an arowana fish.

**April 8, 2021/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Another sloth named Flash died under similar circumstances at SeaQuest Las Vegas. (See the July 30, 2020, entry.) The second Flash had only been at SeaQuest Las Vegas for five months before he died. The necropsy documented that he had been found "minimally responsive on the floor" and had "developed twitching behavior" and lack of appetite—similar symptoms to those displayed by the first Flash, who died just seven months after his arrival at SeaQuest.

**March 25, 2021/SeaQuest, Trumbull, Connecticut:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to handle otters in a manner that did not cause them trauma, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort. In June 2020, an employee hit otters with a metal food bowl when the animals jumped on and around the employee, who was performing

assigned husbandry duties. It was also cited for failing to have an effective barrier around the otters during a public feeding, which resulted in an incident in which a small child was bitten in July 2020. Similarly, the capybara enclosure was kept unlocked and unattended, allowing a member of the public to enter the enclosure.

SeaQuest was also cited for storing food and bedding directly on the floor, which could get wet and contaminate the supplies, since aquatic tanks and equipment were in the same area. A citation was also issued for failing to have complete acquisition/disposition records for goats, hedgehogs, and Bengal cats.

**February 3, 2021/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have a sufficient barrier around the capybara enclosure after a child, who was able to reach over the side of the enclosure, was bitten by an adult capybara, causing the child's hand to bleed. It was also cited for failing to have appropriate barriers protecting two adult Kunekune pigs and a rabbit from unmonitored public contact and for not fully monitoring an "animal encounter" during which a member of the public attempted to pet a sloth when the attendant's back was turned, resulting in the sloth biting the guest.

SeaQuest was also cited for failing to provide safe enclosures for animals. A sloth was being housed in an enclosure with sheetrock walls with peeling rubber trim. "Sheetrock is not an appropriate material for animal enclosures" because it "can be easily scratched and gouged by an animal and cannot be adequately cleaned and disinfected." The off-exhibit area for the small-clawed otter had a rotting wall, exposed insulation, and a gap large enough for an otter's arm or leg to go through between the plywood door (which had mold along the bottom, indicating that it couldn't

be cleaned adequately) and the cinderblocks.

Finally, the USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to clean the area surrounding the Bengal cat enclosure and failing to maintain complete records of animal acquisitions and dispositions. These records did document that an otter had died and seven had been shipped off to other facilities and that the whereabouts of two capybaras who should have been at the facility were unknown.

**November 4, 2020/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** The USDA cited the San Antonio Aquarium for failing to keep the painted shelter box for a woodchuck in good repair. The sides and entrance had been chewed, creating a rough wood surface that posed an injury risk to the animal.

**August 21, 2020/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have acquisition forms and appropriate identification for three Bengal cats.

**July 30, 2020/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Flash, a 1-year-old two-toed sloth, died after suffering from intermittent twitching, weakness, and inappetence for a month from an undetermined cause. Various medical treatments were tried and subsequently failed. Flash was noted to be thin at the time of his death.

**March 21, 2020/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** The San Antonio Aquarium was shut down by police after the owner refused to close. The Leon Valley Police Department had advised the facility on March 18 that it could not open to the public in light of the emergency declaration by the state that nonessential establishments should close their doors because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The aquarium's manager was given a citation and ordered to close the facility immediately after police arrived on March 21. Officers returned an hour later and found that there were still people at the aquarium and that it was "operating as if there was no emergency declaration in place," according to Chief of Police Joseph Salvaggio. A second citation was issued, and visitors and nonessential employees were removed by police.

**February 25, 2020/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** A coatimundi named Rocket jumped on a child during a public interaction and scratched or bit the child's lip. As a result, the animal was removed from public interactions for a 30-day quarantine period.

**January 13, 2020/SeaQuest, Layton, Utah:** The USDA issued SeaQuest a critical repeat citation for allowing public interactions with Gus, a South American coatimundi, without adequate barriers or direct control of him. A guest and an employee were bitten by Gus during a public interaction session. Two coatimundis were allowed free physical contact with seated guests within the enclosure.

**January 3, 2020/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** An employee was bitten by Chip, a small-clawed otter, during a presentation. Chip was quarantined for 10 days because of the risk of rabies exposure. This was his second attack. (See the September 7, 2019, entry.)

**November 26, 2019/SeaQuest, Layton, Utah:** Vince Covino's father was bitten on the hand by an otter. The animal was placed in quarantine for 11 days.

On the same day, an employee was bitten by a coatimundi at this location.

**November 21, 2019/SeaQuest, Layton, Utah:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing

to handle Gus, a South American coatimundi, in a manner that would minimize risk to the public and the animal. The facility allowed public interactions without adequate barriers or direct control of Gus, resulting in bites to a visitor and an employee.

**October 22, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for housing two rabbits with a toucan, which could cause the rabbits stress and spread disease and contamination. The facility was also cited for failing to maintain in good repair an enclosure holding two wallabies. The back wall had two holes exposing drywall, which could be a health hazard if ingested by the animals.

**September 7, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Chip, an 8-month-old small-clawed otter, bit an employee on the wrist. The animal was placed in quarantine for 10 days.

**August 26, 2019/SeaQuest, Layton, Utah:** An otter bit a patron's index finger while being fed. The animal was quarantined for 10 days because of possible rabies exposure.

**July 25, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have acquisition records for several animals and failing to have records pertaining to a sloth, two capybaras, and two Asian small-clawed otters who were no longer at the facility.

**July 22, 2019/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** The USDA cited the San Antonio Aquarium for failing to have an effective barrier for an exhibit holding an armadillo and an African crested porcupine. The inspector was able to "reach over the door and touch the [porcupine]" easily.

**July 1, 2019/SeaQuest, Roseville, Minnesota:** Flash, a two-toed sloth, bit a guest during an encounter. SeaQuest failed to obtain the victim's contact information after the incident, but the victim later reported to the Minnesota Department of Health that the bite had "redness and puffiness." Flash had not been vaccinated for rabies at that time and was put into a 30-day rabies quarantine after the incident.

**June 25, 2019/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** A lawsuit was filed by the parents of a 10-year-old girl who was allegedly bitten by a lemur. The lawsuit alleges that the aquarium initially told the parents that the lemur was vaccinated but later informed them that this was not the case, leading to thousands of dollars in medical expenses.

**June 19, 2019/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA cited SeaQuest again for failing to reduce the risk of injury to visitors during public encounters with an Asian small-clawed otter. Since the previous citation of February 5, 2019, there had been two incidents in which patrons sustained minor wounds from the otter.

**June 7, 2019/SeaQuest, Trumbull, Connecticut:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have a written program of veterinary care.

**May 31, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A patron reported on Yelp that a pig—located in the bird encounter—bit a 3-year-old through her pants, breaking the skin.

**May 29, 2019/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** The USDA cited the Austin Aquarium for failing to consult an attending veterinarian to determine the cause of ear problems exhibited by kangaroos prior to treating them. The manager stated that the animals were undergoing an ear mite

treatment recommended by a facility employee.

**May 20, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Dale, a 4-month-old small-clawed otter, bit an employee while being bathed. The animal was placed in quarantine for 10 days.

**April 25, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A pig bit a person. The animal did not have an up-to-date vaccination and was thus quarantined for 15 days.

**April 23, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A pig lunged at and bit a patron.

**April 3, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Clark County Administrative Services revoked SeaQuest's exotic-animal permit because the facility possessed unpermitted otters and coatimundi. The permit was later reissued with additional conditions.

**April 1, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife suspended SeaQuest's exhibitor's license for two years. The suspension required that the facility send regulated animals—including otters, capybaras, kookaburras, some fish, a sloth, and three types of snake—to other facilities. The hearing examiner's decision states, "The best interest of regulated wildlife and public safety is at the center of this suspension decision. SeaQuest has repeatedly ignored, or failed to report violations, that included human injuries and wildlife care issues."

**March 26, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** In a hearing regarding a \$2,000 fine imposed by Clark County Animal Control over unpermitted otters, information was disclosed on a female Asian small-clawed otter named Jelly, who died after one of her arms became caught in a water pool filtration system. A necropsy was

performed, and it was determined that her cause of death was drowning.

**February 24, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** According to a KTNV investigation, five former SeaQuest employees came forward with concerns about the interactive environment and animal and public safety. One former employee stated, “Oftentimes because they let people walk around, the kids would stomp on the birds and kill them. And then [staff] would throw the birds in the garbage so they didn’t have to record it or show that the birds were dead.” Another former employee claimed that the same thing happened with turtles, adding that “some were actually crushed by kids.” Another alleged that an octopus “cooked alive and burned to death in [his or her] own water” overnight.

**March 30, 2019/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** An Asian small-clawed otter named Xander bit a visitor on the leg during an “otter interaction,” leaving several teeth marks and causing soreness, redness, and a rash. As a result, the otter was removed from public interactions for a 30-day quarantine period.

**February 23, 2019/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** An Asian small-clawed otter named Xander bit a six-year-old child. As a result, the otter was removed from public interactions for a 30-day quarantine period.

**February 22, 2019/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** After a litter of Asian small-clawed otters was born, Clark County Animal Control fined the facility \$2,000 and issued it a citation for having unpermitted animals. SeaQuest’s permit also prohibited it from breeding the otters. The hearing clerk upholding the fine stated, “Instead of remedying this violation, SeaQuest Aquariums attempted to capitalize and profit from it” and “willfully tried to take advantage

of the situation by marketing and attempting to exhibit the baby otters.”

**February 7, 2019/SeaQuest, Folsom, California:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to have animal records available at the time of inspection for examination and failing to have walls and interior surfaces constructed of materials that could be readily sanitized for the health and well-being of the animals.

**February 5, 2019/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA cited SeaQuest for failing to reduce the risk of injury to visitors during public encounters with an Asian small-claw otter. Two visitors were injured during the month that the otter was on exhibit.

**January 18, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Stormin’ Norman, a tortoise, bit a patron’s hand.

**January 10, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Spartacus, an Asian water monitor, jumped up and bit an employee while being fed.

**January 7, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana jumped onto a 6-year-old child’s chest and “got a claw inside her mouth.”

**January 5, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A pufferfish bit an 8-year-old child on the thumb.

**January 5, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana jumped onto an employee’s left shoulder and caught his or her nail in the person’s face under her eye.

**January 2, 2019/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana trying to climb a patron’s leg scratched an employee’s wrist and hand when the employee tried to remove the animal.



**December 27, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a child who was feeding the animal.

**December 21, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A pufferfish bit the thumb of a patron who was feeding the animal.

**December 19, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Jefferson County Animal Control verbally warned SeaQuest about the heat lamp in the sloth enclosure, which posed a burn hazard. This was the second verbal warning after a sloth named Flash was severely burned. (See the December 7, 2018, entry.)

**December 11, 2018/SeaQuest, Folsom, California:** Less than a month after opening, a patron found a dead stingray in the touch tank. According to CBS Sacramento, children were hovering around the pool, touching the animal, who was lying at the bottom of the tank.

**December 9, 2018/SeaQuest, Folsom, California:** Video footage received by PETA showed a fish who had reportedly jumped out of a tank and was struggling on the floor, likely suffocating for about two minutes before an employee used a sweatshirt to return the animal to the water.

**December 9, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A stingray stung an employee. The barb became lodged in the employee's hand, and medical attention was sought at an urgent-care center.

**December 7, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Jefferson County Animal Control issued SeaQuest a verbal warning for the otter exhibit. The enclosure had a feeding tube that the otters could put their paws into, potentially allowing them to come into contact with the public. SeaQuest also received a verbal warning for using heat lamps with inadequate screens to prevent

the animals from sustaining burns. (See the November 8, 2018, entry.)

**November 28, 2018/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** The San Antonio Aquarium was evacuated and shut down by the Leon Valley Fire Department after a number of safety hazards were discovered during a routine fire inspection. The aquarium reopened on December 8, 2018.

**November 25, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a patron's finger while being fed, and a white cockatoo bit an employee's finger.

**November 23, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched an employee's arm.

**November 20, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a 4-year-old child while being fed.

**November 8, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Flash, a sloth, was severely burned by a heat lamp in his enclosure. This was the second time he had been injured by the lamp. (See the October 18, 2018, entry.) The second burn caused swelling of his entire face, including around his eyes, nose, mouth, and lips. There were multiple raw areas and redness on his face with scabbing and skin sloughing, and a couple of the wounds were oozing. According to staff, he winced when eating strawberries and his remaining food had to be cut smaller in order for him to eat.

Jefferson County Animal Control received an anonymous tip about Flash the following day. It visited SeaQuest and was informed that the sloth had been seen by the aquarium's veterinarian, who recommended that staff treat the burn with coconut oil, honey, and Neosporin. Animal Control followed up with the veterinarian, who

stated she had not been notified of Flash's injuries and did not prescribe any treatment. When she saw Flash on her regular visit on November 27, 2018, the injury appeared to be healing. She did not know the full extent of the injury until she spoke with a Colorado Parks and Wildlife officer on December 9, 2018. The veterinarian stated that she would have expected to be contacted by SeaQuest, would have wanted to see the sloth, and would have considered treatment for inflammation, infection, and pain control—not coconut oil and honey.

The employee who falsely claimed that a veterinarian had been consulted was charged with cruelty to animals for neglecting an animal by depriving Flash of veterinary care. The employee was acquitted at trial. SeaQuest and the facility's general manager were both given warnings under Colorado's cruelty-to-animals law. SeaQuest was also issued a permit citation for failing to report the injuries to Flash.

**November 6, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Spartacus, a water monitor, bit a patron's finger. According to the injured visitor's Yelp review, the bite caused what appeared to be serious lacerations to his hand. The patron wrote that "[SeaQuest] handled everything so poorly but promised to take care of everything and sent me to their workers comp facility to treat me. After three weeks of avoiding me they sent me a letter denying responsibility."

**November 2, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A pacu bit a patron who was feeding the fish.

**October 28, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A horn shark bit a 7-year-old child while being fed.

**October 27, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched an

employee who was removing the animal from a tree outside the exhibit.

**October 24, 2018/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** The USDA cited the San Antonio Aquarium for failing to use only trained lemurs under the direct control of an experienced handler during public encounters. An observation record book described several incidents in which the lemurs had bitten or scratched members of the public during interactive encounters. A lemur scratched a boy's arm and then "jumped on [his] head grabbing him aggressively." According to the USDA inspection report, "Three of the six [!] lemurs used in public encounters have bitten or scratched the public."

**October 23, 2018/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** SeaQuest was cited and fined after a capybara named Wesley escaped while being transported to a veterinary office. He was in a dog crate in the back of an open-bed pickup truck when he escaped. He was reportedly recaptured two blocks away in a Target parking lot. Clark County Animal Control records noted that Wesley "had several injuries" and was "bleeding quite a bit." The veterinarian's report stated that the capybara was bleeding from his face and mouth and had a deep dermal abrasion, superficial wounds, a limp, and swelling. An examination found that both of his upper incisors were broken at the gum line.

**October 23, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a toddler while being fed.

**October 20, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** When being fed, an iguana bit a patron.

**October 18, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Flash, a sloth, was burned by a heating lamp in his enclosure. A print of his

nose was observed on the lightbulb. After the incident, staff did not cover the lamp or make it inaccessible to Flash. The attending veterinarian was not consulted about the injury, and staff treated the wound with honey, coconut oil, and Neosporin.

**October 17, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched an employee who was trying to remove the animal from a tree in the enclosure.

**October 15, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit an 8-year-old child while being fed.

**October 7, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit an employee, breaking the skin.

**October 4, 2018/SeaQuest, Fort Worth, Texas:** The USDA documented a “Teachable Moment,” instructing SeaQuest to address the multiple incidents in which the capybara had bitten or scratched members of the public.

**October 2, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Bella, a cockatoo, bit an employee.

**September 29, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A lorikeet bit a patron.

**September 28, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A wallaby named Ben scratched and bit an employee.

**September 27, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife cited and fined SeaQuest for two counts of failing to report injuries to humans. It also issued SeaQuest a separate warning for three additional counts of failure to report human injuries.

**September 27, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A wallaby “grabbed” an

employee’s arm “and scratched & kicked causing the employee’s right arm to bleed.” The report also noted that “occasionally [the wallaby] does jump or nip.”

**September 15, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A bamboo shark bit a patron while being fed in the shark lagoon.

On the same day, a water monitor named Spartacus scratched an employee when he was being transferred to a holding container.

**September 14, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A Burmese python named Barbosa struck and latched onto an employee’s hand as the person tried to fill the animal’s water.

**September 13, 2018/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** The USDA cited the Austin Aquarium for failing to have an effective barrier around the coatimundi enclosure that would ensure the safety of the animals and the public, failing to have a public barrier in front of the red ruffed lemur enclosure, failing to provide coatimundis with a safe enclosure—an open hook at the top could cause an animal to be caught or entangled—and failing to maintain the room holding the kinkajou enclosure. There was black debris along the walls and doorframe and a space at the bottom of the wall in a corner of the room that could hide “pests.”

**September 10, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a 5-year-old child who was feeding the animal.

**September 8, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched an employee.

**September 4, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched two employees when they tried to remove the animal from a tree next to the enclosure.

**September 3, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana scratched an employee who was removing the animal from a visitor's leg.

**August 31, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife cited and fined SeaQuest for failing to report the death of a regulated kookaburra. (See the August 2, 2018, entry.)

Colorado Parks and Wildlife also issued SeaQuest warnings for the following: unlawful importation and possession of six wood ducks, unlawful importation of a caiman and wallaby, five counts of failing to report injuries to humans, and failing to report the deaths of 250 trout.

**August 27, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A patron was bitten on the hand by an iguana.

On the same day, porcupine pufferfish bit a patron when she put her finger in the animal's enclosure. According to the incident report, the patron flung the fish out of the tank when she was bitten but caught the animal before he or she touched the ground. The woman's husband later reported that she had called 911 to report numbness and difficulty breathing as a result of the incident.

**August 26, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** While talking to patrons, an employee was bitten by a sulcata tortoise named Stormin' Norman.

**August 22, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** An iguana bit a toddler on the finger as she fed the animal.

**August 17, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Bossk, a red tegu, "was getting a little rowdy" when he was being carried back from a birthday party, and he scratched an employee's arm.

**August 15, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife cited and fined SeaQuest for failing to comply with the conditions of its zoological park license by not reporting the cease and desist order and importation violations issued by the Colorado Department of Agriculture.

**August 14, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Twelve trout died while being transported to SeaQuest.

**August 4–5, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** SeaQuest stored approximately 80 parakeets in an underage teenager's garage after the company was ordered to shut down the interactive aviary. (See the July 23, 2018, entry.) The teenager's family then advertised them on Facebook as being available for free, and most of the birds were given away in a hardware store parking lot. According to Colorado Department of Agriculture records, SeaQuest's transfer of the birds to the teenager and the public violated the July 23, 2018, cease and desist order.

**August 2, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A kookaburra was found dead by an employee. Long pieces of material were found in the back of the bird's throat, but it was uncertain whether they were the cause of death.

**August 1, 2018/SeaQuest, Fort Lauderdale, Florida:** U.S. Rep. Ted Deutch asked the USDA to open an investigation into allegations of animal mistreatment by SeaQuest, which planned to open a new location in Fort Lauderdale in November 2018.

**July 31, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The USDA documented a "Teachable Moment" regarding excess feces in a wallaby holding unit.

**July 28, 2018/San Antonio Aquarium, San Antonio, Texas:** Three visitors smuggled a horn shark out using a stroller. The incident was captured on security footage, and the public disclosure of it led to the retrieval of the shark two days later.

**July 23, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The Colorado Department of Agriculture issued a cease and desist order to SeaQuest, ordering it to stop “operating as a pet animal sanctuary and retail aquarium facility without possessing a valid license.” SeaQuest had applied for the license in May and requested a temporary exemption from the licensing requirement so that it could operate until a license was issued. That request was denied, yet SeaQuest continued to operate.

**July 20, 2018/ SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The Colorado Department of Agriculture failed SeaQuest during a third Pet Animal Care Facilities Act (PACFA) pre-license inspection because several open violations meant that the facility didn’t meet the requirements for licensure. The facility had a direct violation for failing to have environmental conditions necessary to protect the health and safety of birds. A direct violation was also noted for allowing budgies and lorikeets to land on the floor among people walking in the enclosure, leaving them vulnerable to injury. A direct violation was also noted for failing to clean the birds’ drinking water containers properly. Water containers were being wiped out but not cleaned or sanitized. Direct repeat violations were noted for failing to have an isolation room set up that was clean and organized well to keep birds safe and failing to have all birds banded or photographed with bands attached. Only 52 of the 85 budgies had been photographed with bands attached.

**July 5, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The Colorado Department of

Agriculture identified a direct violation at SeaQuest during a PACFA pre-license inspection for failing to have an adequate isolation room in its bird facility. At the time of the inspection, the facility had changed the isolation room to a room with an exhaust fan leading directly outside, but the room didn’t have a sink.

**June 26, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** The Colorado Department of Agriculture failed SeaQuest during a PACFA pre-license inspection because several open violations meant that the facility had failed to meet licensure requirements. The following direct violations were identified during the inspection: failing to have a set isolation room with adequate ventilation, failing to have a bird band license to properly band and photograph all new birds, and failing to have a retail aquarium license for the transfer of koi to other facilities once they grew too large. The facility also had an indirect violation for failing to seal the wood and concrete walls in the main bird enclosure properly.

**June 26, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A lizard bit a person during feeding.

On the same day, a total of 250 rainbow trout fingerlings died in transit to SeaQuest.

**June 23, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** Colorado Parks and Wildlife cited and fined SeaQuest for unlawful importation and possession of a two-toed sloth and failure to obtain a zoological park license for the animal. SeaQuest was also issued warnings for the unlawful importation and possession of two capybaras. Officials had found the sloth and capybaras in the basement of a SeaQuest manager’s home. Ten days after SeaQuest was told that they weren’t to be moved to its facility until a license had been issued, officials found all three animals on display.

**June 14, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** SeaQuest failed a Colorado Department of Agriculture pre-license inspection by failing to meet all the necessary requirements. Issues documented during the inspection included unlawfully transferring koi without a license and allowing the public to walk through the main bird enclosure while birds were on the ground, creating “a safety concern for the birds as they are small enough to be stepped on.” There were also several issues related to the physical condition and sanitation of the bird enclosures.

**June 5, 2018/SeaQuest, Littleton, Colorado:** A patron kicked and stomped on birds in the aviary, resulting in the deaths of five birds and injuries to others. In addition, a sloth bit an employee on her arm while she was attempting to move the animal to a crate.

**May 4, 2018/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** A female Asian small-clawed otter died. The necropsy stated that the death may have been caused by the “stress of shipping to Vegas, introduction to a new environment and caging during construction.”

**April 6, 2018/SeaQuest, Las Vegas, Nevada:** Clark County Animal Control issued a warning letter to SeaQuest for illegally housing otters and a coatimundi without the required permits.

**March 14, 2017/Boise, Idaho:** The Idaho Department of Finance fined Vince Covino and SeaQuest \$5,000 for failing to disclose his previous securities disciplinary action while selling membership interests in SeaQuest to investors.

**November 30, 2016:** After Ammon Covino was involved in opening two SeaQuest aquariums—in Layton, Utah, and Las Vegas, Nevada—a federal judge ordered

him back to prison again because he had violated his parole.

**February 24, 2016:** A federal judge ordered Ammon Covino back to prison after he remained engaged in activities at the Austin, Portland, and San Antonio aquariums—a violation of the terms of his parole. The warrant indicated that, when discovered, Ammon had lied to his probation officer about the violation.

**April 2, 2015/Boise, Idaho:** The Idaho attorney general released the findings of an investigation into the Idaho Aquarium, which had been opened by Ammon Covino and run by him for several years. The report noted that the aquarium had engaged in questionable use of charitable funds and poor recordkeeping, including the following:

- Recordkeeping practices were so poor that it was impossible to determine to what extent the company’s charitable assets had been misappropriated.
- Ammon had been paid excessive compensation and benefits in 2012, when he dedicated substantial time to opening the Portland Aquarium. He received payments totaling \$140,500, in addition to thousands of dollars’ worth of employment benefits, including payments for cell phones, gas, insurance, food, and other personal expenses.
- The company engaged in deceptive solicitations for charitable contributions to support its mission and to fund specific projects, including a river otter exhibit.
- The Idaho Aquarium allegedly purchased animals for the Portland Aquarium, of which Ammon had a 40 percent stake.
- Ammon used money from the Idaho Aquarium to purchase a car and subsequently took that vehicle with him when he moved to Austin, Texas.

- More than \$11,000 was paid to Chris Conk—who was involved in Ammon’s wildlife trafficking—to reimburse him for the loss of his pickup truck to federal authorities.

**December 17, 2013/Idaho Aquarium, Boise, Idaho:** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service confiscated a green sea turtle from the Idaho Aquarium. The facility had a permit for the animal, but it was revoked following Ammon Covino’s conviction on December 4, 2013.

**December 4, 2013/Boise, Idaho:** Ammon Covino pleaded guilty to a federal Lacey Act violation for conspiracy to traffic wildlife illegally. He was sentenced to a year and a day in prison and two years of supervised release. As part of his probation, the judge ordered him “not [to] engage in any activity that involves exhibiting, importing, exporting, transporting, selling, receiving, acquiring or purchasing in interstate or foreign commerce any fish or wildlife.”

**August 19, 2013/Portland Aquarium, Portland, Oregon:** *The Oregonian* published the death log from the Portland Aquarium. According to the documents, over 200 marine animals died in a three-month period. Causes of death were reported as starvation, getting caught in a drain screen, being “[r]ipped apart,” being attacked by other animals, and more. The Portland Aquarium closed down in early 2016.

**April 2013/Idaho Aquarium, Boise, Idaho:** The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service confiscated three puffins from the Idaho Aquarium, which didn’t have a federal migratory bird permit. The aquarium had obtained four birds, but one died before the others were taken away. The facility had applied for a permit in June in an attempt to recover the birds, but the application was denied because the staff had no experience in

caring for puffins, there was no adequate puffin enclosure, and a permit couldn’t be issued to anyone with a federal wildlife violation.

**July 18, 2013/Austin Aquarium, Austin, Texas:** Vince Covino was issued a warning for code violations related to the building of the Austin Aquarium, including housing animals in the building without a certificate of occupancy and installing water tanks without obtaining prior site-plan approval.

**February 9, 2012:** Vince Covino consented to a \$5,000 fine and 30-day suspension from the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority for borrowing money from a client to purchase a home, in violation of its rules. Vince didn’t register or associate as a broker-dealer agent after his suspension ended.