

Dade City's Wild Things (Stearns Zoological Rescue & Rehab Center)

36909 Blanton Rd., Dade City, FL 33523

Dade City's Wild Things (aka Stearns Zoological Rescue & Rehab Center) has failed to meet minimum federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Among other issues, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide adequate veterinary care, failing to maintain enclosures, failing to provide animals with sufficient shelter, and failing to handle animals as carefully as possible in a manner that didn't cause behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort. Contact PETA for documentation.

June 28, 2021: Dade City's Wild Things owner Kathy Stearns pleaded guilty to two felony charges relating to the fraudulent solicitation of charitable contributions.

March 23, 2020: The U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida entered a final judgment in PETA's favor in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) lawsuit filed in October 2016 against Dade City's Wild Things and its principals, Kathy Stearns and her son, Randy Stearns. The judgment established that the defendants' treatment of tigers—including prematurely separating tiger cubs from their mothers, forcing tiger cubs to participate in encounters with the public, and caging them in substandard conditions—violated the ESA. The court

also issued a permanent injunction banning Dade City's Wild Things and Kathy and Randy Stearns from ever owning or possessing tigers again and ordered them to forfeit their tigers for placement in reputable sanctuaries.

March 18, 2020: The USDA issued Dade City's Wild Things a critical citation for refusing an inspection. After its inspectors arrived at the facility's front gate, they called the licensee and left her a voicemail. She called back and refused an inspection, then about five minutes later, she walked out of her house and said, "Write me up, I don't care! ... I've done a joint inspection with Fish and Game and USDA, and I'm not going to do it again. I can't refuse you guys [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission], but I can refuse USDA."

March 10, 2020: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a responsible adult on site to allow officials to conduct an inspection.

February 7, 2020: The USDA issued a decision and an order in response to the remand of the complaint that the agency had filed against Dade City's Wild Things on July 17, 2015. The facility was assessed a civil penalty of \$16,000, issued a 90-day license suspension, and ordered to cease and desist violating the AWA. The order went into effect on March 20, 2020, after Dade City's Wild Things withdrew its appeal.

January 8, 2020: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have an adequate perimeter fence. There were areas of the fence with spaces that could allow the entry of unauthorized humans and animals and sections of fence that were less than the required 8 feet in height. The perimeter fence also failed to function as a secondary containment system for the animals. The enclosure for two wallabies

included a portion of the perimeter fence as part of the enclosure fencing, which could allow physical contact between the wallabies and animals outside the perimeter fence.

August 23, 2019: Dade City's Wild Things owner Kathy Stearns was arrested on three felony charges for alleged crimes relating to the solicitation of charitable contributions.

October 2, 2017: The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services filed a lawsuit against Dade City's Wild Things and its principals—Kathy, Kenny, and Randy Stearns—for allegedly funneling hundreds of thousands of dollars from the nonprofit roadside zoo into Kathy and Kenny's turf business. The money was then allegedly used for personal expenses, including nearly \$10,000 for Randy's wedding and over \$24,000 toward delinquent payments in Kathy's 2013 personal bankruptcy case. The lawsuit also alleges that over \$15,000 had been used directly from roadside zoo accounts to pay for her personal bankruptcy case. In addition, the lawsuit alleges that Dade City's Wild Things solicited donations without being registered as a charitable organization in the state of Florida; that in September 2016, the state fined Stearns Zoological \$500 for soliciting donations without being registered to do so; and that although a cease and desist order was issued, the roadside zoo continued to ask the public for money through social media.

May 23, 2017: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for the repeat violation of failing to maintain enclosures in good repair to protect the animals from injury and to contain the animals. The jungle cat enclosure had a hole in the fencing where wires were bent and separated, creating a risk of injury or escape. The den in a lion enclosure had a board on the roof that was separating from the structure and had a

screw or nail coming loose, and a zebra enclosure had fencing with exposed sharp wire points at the animal's eye level, sharp points of barbed wire, and a dead tree limb nearby. The zebra was seen rubbing his or her head along the fencing that had sharp exposed wire and tripping and becoming tangled in the dead tree limb near the fence. The zebra was also bumping up against the section of fencing with sharp points of barbed wire.

In addition, Dade City's Wild Things was cited for failing to provide a female lion and a raccoon with adequate veterinary care. The lion had hair loss around her eyes, face, back, and ear margins, and the raccoon was thin, walked stiffly, and had hair loss. The owner did not have veterinary medical records on hand for review during the inspection. The inspection report stated that the information available at the time of the visit and the following day was not sufficient to demonstrate adequate veterinary care for the animals.

The facility was also cited for individually housing both a single ring-tailed lemur and a single bush baby in enclosures in which they could not see or hear any other primates of their own or a compatible species. Psychological distress secondary to social distress could develop, according to the inspection report. The facility was also cited for failing to have a provision addressing the social grouping of specific primate species or considerations for primates who could not see or hear animals of their own or other compatible species in its Environmental Enhancement Plan for primates.

The facility was also cited for failing to provide otters with appropriate housing to allow normal postural and social adjustments and freedom of movement. The otters were housed in an enclosure that did not have an appropriate pool for the animals

to swim in. Only a small, shallow bucket of water was provided, and an otter was observed approaching the bucket several times to try to get in, but it was barely big enough for the animal to fit. The licensee stated that the otters have access to a larger swimming pool during visitor "swim-with" encounters, but these do not occur every day. As otters are aquatic animals, swimming is a normal behavior for them.

February 16, 2017: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to handle two 3-week-old bobcats properly—the roadside zoo arranged for the shipment of the bobcats to an Oregon facility even though the USDA has determined that transporting nondomestic cats at such a young age could expose them to pathogens that their immune system wouldn't be able to handle.

Dade City's Wild Things was also cited for failing to handle a macaque named Lucy safely. During an animal encounter, she was kept on a leash, was allowed to go up to visitors without any barriers, and allegedly bit a child. The facility was also cited for failing to keep enclosures in good repair.

February 15, 2017: The USDA issued a decision and order in response to the July 17, 2015, complaint that the agency had filed against Dade City's Wild Things. The facility was assessed a civil penalty of \$21,000, issued a 60-day license suspension, and ordered to cease and desist violating the AWA, including by allowing the public to swim with tiger cubs. The order was stayed pending a ruling on Dade City's Wild Things' appeal.

November 29, 2016: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to maintain four enclosures in good repair.

March 29, 2016: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to allow officials

access for an inspection. When the inspectors identified themselves to the licensee, the licensee stated that she had made an agreement with the USDA that exempted her from inspections on Tuesdays. After the assigned inspector and supervisor confirmed that no such agreement existed, the licensee still refused to allow an inspection.

August 25, 2015: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide an opossum with adequate veterinary care (the animal was being treated for a tail injury with a topical spray that had an expiration date of 2012), failing to provide several animals with sufficient shelter from inclement weather; failing to provide dry enclosures (a few tigers had exhibits with an accumulation of water), failing to clean the freezer (it was extremely dirty and had a buildup of chicken and other meat on the floor), failing to clean the metal water container in the enclosure holding llamas (the inspector noted that it was sitting in the sun and ducks were bathing in the water), and failing to clean the shelter box for the kinkajou. Debris had fallen under the box through the slats, and urine and wastewater stains were seen running down the wall where the box was attached. Dade City's Wild Things was also cited for failing to maintain several enclosures. The wire mesh fencing in the enclosure holding a cow was bent, fencing in the enclosure holding deer had a gap that could allow a baby deer to escape or other animals to enter, and an enclosure holding a tiger had rotted wood and exposed screws that could potentially harm the animal.

July 17, 2015: The USDA filed a complaint against Dade City's Wild Things for 20 violations of the AWA, including four separate citations for failing to handle young tigers as carefully as possible in a manner that didn't cause behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort; two

separate citations of using physical abuse to handle young tigers, including pulling the tigers' tails to restrain them and holding a tiger aloft by his neck; and two citations for "exposing young or immature tigers to rough or excessive handling and/or exhibiting them for periods of time that would be detrimental to their health or well-being" and for "exhibiting young tigers for periods of time and/or under conditions that were inconsistent with their good health and well-being."

February 11, 2015: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide shelter that was in good repair in an enclosure holding primates (the shelter was rotting in some areas), failing to remove an accumulation of fecal material and food from an enclosure holding a marmoset, failing to remove an accumulation of excreta from an enclosure holding a leopard (it appeared to have been there for more than three days), and failing to maintain the shelter that held a capuchin. Parts of it contained rotted wood, and what appeared to be rodent droppings were on top of the wood that was covering the lockout area of the shelter. Roaches were also under an old plastic tarp on the floor.

Dade City's Wild Things was also cited for failing to provide several animals with safe enclosures. One enclosure holding a tiger had a rusted, detached pipe, which compromised the integrity of the structure, and another had a platform too close to the top of the enclosure, which could aid the tiger in escaping. The enclosure holding deer had a 1-foot gap at the top of the gate entrance, which could cause a deer's head to get stuck. An enclosure holding a serval had exposed underground wire that could potentially trap the cat's paw and cause injury, and the enclosure for a black jaguar had a detached piece of wood that compromised the structural integrity of the platform.

November 21, 2013: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have an official USDA form of identification for a dog being used in "interaction sessions," failing to provide a tiger with an enclosure of sufficient height to allow for normal postural movements, and failing to provide a pig with safe housing. It contained a rusted pipe with jagged edges.

September 9, 2013: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a responsible adult available to accompany officials during an inspection.

May 21, 2013: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a suitable method to eliminate excess water quickly in an enclosure holding a tiger and failing to maintain the enclosure holding two baboons. It contained a detached welded pole that could threaten the enclosure's structural integrity.

September 6, 2012: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to secure an electrical wire that was hanging loose in an enclosure holding a lion.

May 31, 2012: Regarding seven previously cited violations, the USDA issued Dade City's Wild Things an official warning for violating federal regulations.

February 23, 2012: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to maintain a section of fence in the enclosure holding a serval. It contained a "flaky rusted tube."

January 26, 2012: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a responsible person available so that an animal-welfare inspection could be conducted.

September 14, 2011: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to handle a tiger cub properly. During a "tiger swim

session," a cub was reluctant to move to the edge of the pool, and the handler pulled him by the leash. The cub showed signs of distress by vocalizing and moving around when he was handled inside the pool. After swimming a short distance, he then swam toward the handler who was at the wall of the pool and extended his paws, apparently wanting to get out, but instead of pulling him out of the water and stopping the encounter, the handler decided to continue with the swimming.

July 27, 2011: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to handle a macaque properly. A member of the public claimed to have been bitten during a "close encounter" with the monkey.

May 17, 2011: The USDA issued repeat citations to Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide animals with safe enclosures. The housing for a macaque had a detached welded pole in the roof area that had sharp edges on the exposed end, and the resting platform for a tiger had a protruding nail.

February 22, 2011: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide animals with safe enclosures. An enclosure holding a macaque had a "platform wood pole" hanging on the side with a piece of wire attached to it. The corners had been chewed on a wooden platform in an enclosure holding a tiger, and one of the enclosures holding a tiger had an accumulation of water in some areas. The facility was also cited for failing to maintain the food-preparation area, which had multiple areas of peeling paint, and failing to clean the enclosure holding a coatimundi as well as the litterbox inside the enclosure holding a bobcat, both of which had an accumulation of fecal material.

November 2, 2010: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide

animals with adequate veterinary care. A black leopard named Cleo had swollen eyelids but had never received treatment by the attending veterinarian, and the canids weren't receiving heartworm medication. The facility was also cited for failing to have a written environmental enhancement plan for primates that was approved by the attending veterinarian and failing to maintain shelving in the walk-in cooler, which was rusty.

May 4, 2010: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to maintain an enclosure holding two tigers that had an extremely worn elevated resting surface, failing to have a suitable method of rapidly eliminating excess water from an enclosure used for tigers, and failing to have a perimeter fence of adequate height. In one section, overhanging vines were pulling down the barbed wire.

January 7, 2010: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a barrier between a volunteer and a 10-month-old tiger who was sitting right next to the volunteer in a photo.

October 13, 2009: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to maintain the shelter box that was being used for three jungle cats (its wooden top was in disrepair), failing to provide three buffalo and two beefalo with shelter, failing to have a perimeter fence around the back portion of the enclosure holding 11 white-tailed deer that would restrict unauthorized people from having direct access to the animals and that would act as a secondary containment system, and failing to maintain the perimeter fence behind the enclosures holding an owl monkey and ferrets. Excessive foliage had pushed the top barbed wire and supports down in one section, and there was also a gap approximately 6 inches high and 24 inches long.

September 1, 2009: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to provide four young tigers with sufficient shelter from inclement weather. They all weren't able to access the shelter at the same time.

September 22, 2008: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a perimeter fence of sufficient height for use as a secondary containment system if an animal escaped and to keep unauthorized people from entering and having contact with the animals at the facility.

May 20, 2008: The USDA cited Dade City's Wild Things for failing to have a responsible person available so that an animal-welfare inspection could be conducted.