Policy and Procedures: ANIMAL ESCAPE
Purpose: To recover an animal in case of an escape while ensuring the safety of the public, staff and the animal.
File Number: 01
Last Reviewed: June 6, 2016
Pertains To: All employees, part time and temporary staff, contract workers, volunteers, interns and co-op students (collectively referred to as “STAFF”)

PREPAREDNESS AND PREVENTION

All staff should receive a copy of this protocol during orientation and their supervisor should explain their role in the event of an animal escape. Keeper training programs should promote safety and vigilance in daily routines. Periodic review and inspection of all animal facilities should be conducted with prompt correction of minor facility flaws. It is also very important that staff maintain a continuous check on the psychological condition of the animals. Escapees may vary from small invertebrate to large mammals.

In addition to the responsibilities associated with their job title, every staff member should be familiar with what is to be done if they observe an escaped animal. Escape drills are performed three times yearly. All animal staff should be familiar with the location of capture equipment.

Training and/or practice in the use of the firearms should be conducted annually for those authorized to use firearms on zoo grounds. The Director and supervisor must ensure that the firearms are maintained and in good working order.

Obviously, attempts should be made to prevent animal escapes whenever possible. If an animal is in the process of escaping (climbing, digging, chewing, etc.), preventative escape strategies can include loud noises (yelling, whistle, air horn, etc.), bucket of water, water hose, using a fire extinguisher or pepper spray.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

In the case of an escaped animal, efficient response is crucial to the safety of visitors, staff and animals. Carelessness can be avoided by keeping calm and using common sense.

Each animal has its own flight distance. This is the distance at which the animal will flee from a pursuer. In captivity, the flight distance is altered by moats, fences, etc. However, the flight distance is likely to be more critical and be much greater in the absence of barriers. An animal usually has a shorter flight distance for a vehicle than for a person on foot. Where practical, use a vehicle.

An escaped animal is confused and frightened. Given the opportunity, it will move towards familiar surroundings. To make the animal move, methodically violate the flight distance. Use this to your advantage. Attempt to “persuade” the escaped animal to move towards a secure enclosure by carefully, slowly and slightly violating its flight distance. If you are only trying to contain the animal, do not violate flight distance.
Each animal also has a FIGHT distance. This is the distance at which the animal will attack a perceived aggressor. If an animal is cornered and you move within its flight distance, you may violate its fight distance. Do not violate and animal’s fight distance unless absolutely necessary and proper safety precautions are in place. Use an enclosed vehicle when possible.

Animals usually have a strong attachment for their home enclosure. If the animal has not ventured far from its enclosure, you may be able to lure, coax, guide or herd it back inside. The presence of its mate, food, dark, fight, etc., may help entice an animal. Give it a chance to return.

You may also herd an animal back to its enclosure by using fire extinguishers, noise, light, or careful violation of its flight distance. Take care when attempting to use these methods.

An escaped animal is in a strange situation and will feel quite threatened. Unfamiliar surroundings, items identified with negative consequences (nets, tranquilizer guns, hoses, etc.), sudden movements and loud noises will cause a reaction. Move slowly and keep the area as quiet as possible. Try to keep the animal calm and controlled.

When a dangerous animal escapes, often it will have a recognition alarm reaction to a rifle, pistol used in darting procedures. Therefore, it is important that people on the scene conceal all firearms. Other appropriate weapons should be available for protection of people, but concealed to minimize adverse reaction by the animal.

Examples of positive stimuli that will calm the animal are: being near a familiar area, sensing familiar people or animals, food or coaxing sound from a familiar keeper. Watch the animal’s mood and response. Constantly evaluate its expression stance, and other attitudes. You can determine whether the animal is anxious, calm or about to flee/attack. Act accordingly, carefully and with common sense. Again, the safety of the public and staff is paramount. The safety of the animal is secondary.

The chief concern is to protect the public and staff. This is especially critical when a dangerous animal escapes and confronts the public or attempts to breach the zoo’s perimeter fence. Make every effort to keep the public away from an escaped animal. If persuasion or immobilization is ineffective in recapturing the animal, the escaped animal will have to be dispatched (shot). Only police or a staff member who is licensed to use a firearm may exercise this option.

Large predators are usually the most dangerous, such as bears, wolves, jaguars and tigers. For safety, vehicles should be used in surveillance and containment when possible. When an animal is out of its enclosure everyone who is not in a secure location is in potential danger.

**RADIO CODES AND MESSAGE FORMAT**

- **Code Red**: Dangerous animal escape (eg- mature lion, tiger, etc.)
- **Code Yellow**: Hazardous animal escape (eg- bobcat, spider monkey, etc.)
- **Code Blue**: Non-threat animal escape (eg- kangaroo, deer, etc.)
- **Code Green**: Animal escape drill
- **All Clear**: Self-explanatory (can only be issued by the Emergency Coordinator)
The message should be relayed to staff in a slow and clear manner using the following format:

“Code [colour], [species of animal], [where seen]”. Repeat twice and ask for confirmation.

**Example:** “Code Red, Lion by the hoof stock paddock. I repeat. Code Red, Lion by the hoof stock paddock. Do you copy?”

**IMPORTANT:** Radio Frequency #3 is the designated Emergency Radio Frequency. This ensures an open/clear network of communication reserved for just Emergencies.

After the Animal Escape radio alert is issued on Radio Frequency #1, the Spotter immediately changes their radio to Emergency Radio Frequency #3. Upon hearing the radio alert, all staff immediately change to Emergency Radio Frequency #3 and respond with a simple “YES”. Staff can then begin responding accordingly.

All radio communication thereafter should be short, clear and used only when absolutely necessary.

**WHISTLE ALERT**

Every set of Zookeeper keys/Support Staff keys has a whistle. The whistle is to be used in lieu of a radio or phone when neither are available. The Spotter sounds the alert with **three short, fast whistles**. Staff that hear this respond with the same three short, fast whistles. This relays the alert to others and lets the Spotter know that they’ve been heard. If the Spotter does not hear a response within a few seconds, then they repeat the whistle alert.

It is important to recognize that depending on the situation, the whistle could draw the animals attention towards staff. Only use this alert if it’s safe to do so.

Zoo Camp participants are to be instructed, upon hearing this alert, to move quickly and directly to either the nearest Zoo Camp staff member or one of the designated safe areas, whichever is closest.

**IMMEDIATE GOALS**

1. Ensure public safety
2. Ensure staff safety
3. Ensure animal safety
4. Recapture the animal

**AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The most senior staff member on the grounds is the person in charge. They may take the role of Emergency Coordinator or delegate the role to another senior staff member. No one is to do anything beyond assembling until the Emergency Coordinator has given directions.
Team A: Responsible for Escape Coordination and Recapture

Director or Supervisor (Emergency Coordinator)  
Veterinarian  
Head Zookeeper  
Other staff as assigned by the Emergency Coordinator

Roles that may have to be filled by Team A: Shooter, Spotter, First Aid Support

Team B: Responsible for Site Security, Public Safety, Communications and Documentation

Administration Office Manager (Base Coordinator) and Staff  
Visitor Service Manager and Staff  
Volunteers/Other placement workers  
Other staff as assigned by the Emergency Coordinator

Roles that may have to be filled by Team B: First Aid Support, Police Liaison, EMS Liaison,  
Spokesperson (public/media), Entrance Security (posted by main gate), documenting events as they unfold.

PROCEDURES

Every animal escape is different. The procedures presented here will undoubtedly require some modification to fit the circumstances. Special attention needs to be taken with dangerous animals, those that pose a serious risk to humans, other animals or itself. The following three points are of utmost concern:

1. The protection of visitors, staff and the community is the highest priority.  
2. No zoo animal should be allowed to leave the zoo premises.  
3. No one is to endanger themselves to “rescue” others.

Instruction for the individual who first observes the escape (“Spotter”):

1. Stay calm, do not panic. Make every attempt to keep the animal in sight and located at all times.  
2. Keep a safe distance. DO not rush at the animal. Many times an escaped animal wants to stay near its enclosure. Once an animal is disoriented the recapture becomes much more difficult.  
3. Try to carefully evaluate the situation, location, immediate dangers, number of animals involved, and what species as quickly as possible.  
4. In the case of the primates, reptiles, amphibians or invertebrates escaping, confine them if possible, inside the building in which their indoor enclosure is located.  
5. If you cannot handle the situation by yourself, quickly, safely and confidently alert staff using the appropriate radio code. If a radio is not available, use a phone or find someone to deliver the message to administration. DO NOT leave the area or lose sight of the specimen; it’s better to delay getting the message out rather than to lose track of the animal.
In the case of the escape of a dangerous animal, such as a mature large cat, the following procedure should be carried out:

TEAM A

- Upon notification of the incident, an Emergency Coordinator is designated (eg: Director, Head Zookeeper, Senior Administrator, etc.)
- Ensure radio communication between the Emergency Coordinator and the Administration Office.
- Members of Team 1 convene in a safe location within view of the escaped animal, preferably with the “Spotter”. If it is safe to do so, the animal’s enclosure should be secured so that others cannot escape and so that the escaped animal has the option to return inside.
- The situation is quickly examined and the decision made as to whether attempts should be made to manually capture, chemically immobilize, or euthanize the animal. In extreme emergencies, an escaped animal may need to be destroyed. The necessary equipment is then gathered (see list of escape equipment below).
- The decision is made whether or not support personnel are required: Veterinarian, Police, Emergency Medical Service (EMS) and/or a “Shooter”. The Emergency Coordinator makes the request to the Base Coordinator to contact the required support personnel. If a “shooter” is required then an individual authorized and licensed to use a firearm immediately retrieves the firearm.
- If present, the veterinarian is responsible for directing the immobilization of the animal. Make certain that you test the charge on the immobilize gun before you load it (and are near the animal).
- Only Team A and support personnel should be in the vicinity during and immediately after the incident. There should be no large crowds around the capture/kill scene unless extra help is requested by the Emergency Coordinator to move the animal.

TEAM B

- Upon notification of the incident, the Senior staff member in the Administration Office assumes the role of Base Coordinator. Volunteers or seasonal staff nearby without a radio should be alerted personally. The Base Coordinator takes his/her place in the Administration Office with a radio and phone, ready to take directions from the Emergency Coordinator and delegate responsibilities for Team B.
- Team B immediately begins to evacuate the public or secure them within places of safety (examples noted further below). Staff may explain to the public that there is a serious situation and for their safety and the safety of the animal they need to be moved to a safe location. Be polite but assertive.
- The perimeter of the Zoo should be secured by closing all Entrance/Exit gates. This also prevents new visitors from arriving and Zoo guests from leaving, actions which could possibly allow the animal to breach the perimeter. The Base Coordinator should assign a staff member for Entrance Security, to be posted near the main gate, within the safety of a vehicle, to meet Emergency Services/Support personnel. They should be in radio contact with the Base Coordinator.
- Once all Team B members complete their assigned duties they should contact the Base Coordinator to report their status and get updates on the current situation.
- A vehicle is made available and ready (keys in the ignition) in the parking lot in case Team 1 needs to become quickly mobile.
• For the post-incident review or any possible police investigation, the Base Coordinator should quickly document events as they unfold (as seen or heard through radio communications). The information doesn’t have to go into detail, but rather point-form. It’s important that the time of each event is documented.

Example: “2:10pm Candice requests tarp and pepper spray”

THE SHOOTER

• Only the Director or Emergency Coordinator can issue the command to kill an escaped animal. The reason to do so are as follows:
  1. Human injury or loss of life
  2. Threat of human injury or loss of life
  3. Animal has breached the perimeter fence surrounding the zoo

• Only individuals who have been trained and are authorized/licensed to use firearms may do so. They will have the keys to the locked gun cabinet.

• Always make sure that firearms are on safety and handled with extreme caution. The use of a killing weapon must always be tempered by the potential to endanger human life.

• Whenever possible, the shooter should stay in a vehicle when approaching the animal.

• Never run after the animal. It’s certain that you can’t outrun it. You will be out of breath, which will not allow you to have a steady hand.

• Make sure you have a good clean shot. Be aware of what is in front and behind your target.

• If you must shoot, shoot to kill. If you do not feel you are capable of doing this, relinquish the responsibility to another qualified shooter (if one is available).

• Do not shoot at a running animal unless it is the last resort.

NOTIFICATION OF POLICE

Only the Emergency Coordinator or Director can make the decision to call the Police (911). A staff member from Team B will be designated as the liaison for the Police. The liaison should have a radio. They should be instructed to rendezvous in the Administrative Office where they will be updated by the Base Coordinator. If the Emergency Coordinator has not yet asked for the Police to assist with the recapture, they should be asked to help control the public. Reasons to contact the Police are:

  1. Human injury or loss of life
  2. Threat of human injury or loss of life
  3. Animal has breached the perimeter fence surrounding the zoo
  4. Qualified (licensed) person required to shoot the animal with a firearm if required

HUMAN INJURY OR DEATH
1. If the injury/death is discovered at the same time as the escaped animal, it should be reported with the report of the escape.
2. The injury should be described as well as possible, but briefly (Severe bleeding, head wound, not breathing, unconscious, condition unknown, etc.).
3. The Base Coordinator contacts the Emergency Medical Service (EMS): 911
4. If it is safe to do so, the injured person should be attended by a staff member, preferably someone that is trained in First Aid/CPR.

The area where the first aid is being rendered and/or EMS being awaited should be a secure area. This may require moving the victim, but only if you are sure there is no back or spinal column injury. The person can be moved in this condition if there is a serious threat of being killed by the escaped animal.

A staff member from Team B will be designated as the liaison for the EMS. The liaison should have a radio. They will meet the EMS at the main gate/entrance and immediately update them about the current situation, including any potential risk from the escaped animal and the patient’s condition.

No one is to risk his or her own life to “rescue” another person. One victim is enough.

ANIMAL ESCAPES AFTER HOURS

- During closing hours, there will be a definite lack of available staff, thus making it more difficult to keep visual contact with the animal AND find help. If there is no chance of help arriving, the “Spotter” may leave the scene to contact available Senior Staff (Director, Supervisor, Head Zookeeper, etc).
- Close all perimeter gates.
- Quickly turn on as many interior and exterior lights.
- The “Spotter” should then take a radio, find a secure location, and attempt to find the animal. Secure locations include the Safari Lodge Bed & Breakfast or the roof of any of the Zoo/Safari Zoo Camp buildings.
- The senior staff first on the scene will assume the role of Emergency Coordinator and contact the “Spotter” with the radio for an update and location.
- The decision needs to be made whether or not the recapture should be attempted during the night.
- The Emergency Coordinator can then proceed to contact other staff and/or support personnel.

Persons under the influence of drugs or alcohol or who are otherwise impaired should not respond to the emergency and should inform whoever calls them that such is the case.

RECAPTURE EQUIPMENT

All items are to be checked monthly by staff to ensure availability and functionality.

Recapture Equipment Locker
Pepper Spray
Fire Extinguisher (CO2 only!)
Portable Water Sprayer
2 Pole-Catchers  
Pole Net  
2 Leashes  
Broom  
Towel  
Tarp  
Umbrella  
Waist Pack with Emergency First Aid Supplies and Note Pad/Pen  
Flashlight  

Gun Cabinet  
Shotgun  
Hunting Rifle  
Dart Gun (immobilization/euthanasia)

PLACES OF SAFETY FOR THE PUBLIC

Places of safety will vary with the type of animal that has escaped. Evacuating the public from the entire Zoo is preferred, escorting them safely outside the perimeter fence. This is only an acceptable place of safety for those that have cars in which to leave. Open vehicles or pedestrians outside the zoo are not safe. When staff and/or the public find refuge in any of the Zoo buildings, people should keep a low profile near windows as not to entice the escaped animal. Glass is not a good barrier. Doors should be locked or secured though closely attended by staff to allow those seeking shelter to have quick access.

The following is a list of potentially safe areas for the public:

Administration Office  
Admission Building  
Gift Shop  
Bathrooms  
Bed & Breakfast Rooms (Safari Lodge, Lion’s Den, Jaguar’s Den)  
Education Centre  
Dining Hall  
Safari Zoo Camp Bathroom  
Safari Zoo Camp Bunkhouses (#1-4)  
Parking Lot (when secure in a vehicle)

PUBLIC RELATIONS

One spokesman will be designated by the Director or Emergency Coordinator to answer all queries by the public or media. All questions and/or concerns will be referred to that spokesperson. Staff are not allowed to discuss the incident with non-staff members. They may politely explain that the staff are dealing with a serious situation and that they will be promptly notified once it is safe to do so.
ALL CLEAR

After the emergency, the “All clear” notice will be given by the person in charge. The announcement will be made by phone, radio and/or staff designated to spread the word on foot. All staff will confirm with the office that they have received the word and the situation is back to normal.

POST-INCIDENT PROCEDURE

A formal review process should follow the animal escape to evaluate procedure effectiveness, any resulting consequences and how the escape could have been prevented. Review enhances communication and helps refine procedures. The following questions should be discussed and answered:

1. Was communication adequate?
2. Was the response time appropriate?
3. Was the public adequately safeguarded?
4. Did staff respond appropriately?
5. Was the method of recapture appropriate?
6. Were the drug(s) and dose(s) adequate and appropriate?
7. Has the escape route been fixed?

REFERENCES

Sedgwick County Zoo- Policies and Procedures, Emergency Policies, Revised April 1998
Minnesota Zoological Garden- Policies/Procedure E-18, Revised April 1998
El Paso Zoo- Animal Escapes Policy
Tulsa Zoo- Safety Procedures for Animal Escapes, Controlled Drugs and Venomous Animal Bites
Wikipedia: Emergency response team (zoo)