

Zoo branded 'unethical' after eight animals die in transfer tragedy

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A young sitatunga runs through its enclosure at the zoo in Berlin on September 25, 2013

Animal welfare campaigners Tuesday criticised two major international zoos after eight antelopes shipped from Prague to Johannesburg zoos had to be put down after being confined without water for at least four days.

The Sitatunga antelope arrived at Johannesburg's O.R. Tambo airport on

Friday without proper documentation, South Africa's National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) said.

It claimed that the animals had been without water for four to five days.

"All the animals were in various stages of dehydration and four had already collapsed" when their containers were opened, the NSPCA added. "There were signs of facial injuries and abrasions as a result of these animals trying to reach their water bowls and free themselves from their restrictive crates."

NSPCA Inspector Wendy Wilson said this "tragic incident could have been avoided had the proper protocols been followed."

The animals were initially destined for the Johannesburg Zoo from Prague Zoo—a major breeder of the semi-amphibious species native to central African swamps.

Prague Zoo reacted angrily to the deaths, branding Johannesburg Zoo "unethical and unprofessional" for not revealing that they planned to pass the animals on to a private breeder who would in turn supply other animals to the Johannesburg facility.

"Johannesburg Zoo is fully responsible for this tragedy," director Miroslav Bobek said in a statement to AFP.

Wilson said that despite restrictions on the movement of antelope species from Europe, the animals had passed through three checkpoints, including one at Frankfurt airport in Germany, without the required paperwork.

But Bobek hit back, attacking the South African authorities for ordering "the slaughter of the [animals](#) for one missing veterinary examination".

"Prague Zoo had arranged all veterinary tests and sent all the documents asked. In addition, Johannesburg Zoo remained inexplicably lax and inactive upon the antelopes' arrival... and has acted highly unprofessionally and unethically," he added.

Johannesburg Zoo could not be reached for comment.

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