

Outrage as Danish zoo dissects lion in front of children

October 15 2015, by Sören Billing



Danish officials said they culled the lion to stop inbreeding at the zoo in Odense

A Danish zoo on Thursday dissected a lion in front of a group of children, in an educational event condemned as a "macabre spectacle" by animal rights groups but given a thumbs-up by many Danes.

The nine-month-old lion was one of three that Odense Zoo in central Denmark put down in February, on the grounds it had too many big cats

and could not find a home for the surplus. Since then, the beasts had been kept in a freezer.

Last year, a zoo in the capital Copenhagen came under fire after a healthy giraffe was euthanised and dissected in public.

On Thursday, between 300 and 400 adults and children—some as young as four—gathered around zoo guide Rasmus Kolind as he began the dissection by cutting off the lion's tongue.

Some of the children, who were standing only centimetres (inches) away, held their noses and frowned as the animal was skinned and the stench of the cadaver began to fill the air.

"Wouldn't it be stranger if I were standing here cutting up an animal that smelled like flowers or something else?" Kolind told the crowd.

"Dead animals smell like dead animals. There's not a lot to say about that," he said.

"I don't want to see that," one boy said, but a girl interviewed by public broadcaster DR described the event as "fun to see but also a bit disgusting."

Zoo guide Lotte Tranberg explained why the healthy young lion had to be put down.

"If we had allowed it to stay it could have mated, that is to say have cubs, with its own sisters and its own mother. And then you have what is called inbreeding," she told the crowd.

In a risqué joke, as he proceeded to carve up the carcass, Kolind asked "Is there anyone who would like an eye?" before chopping off the head,

holding it up for everyone to see, and then proceeding to skin it.



Children look on as zoo employees dissect a lion in the Danish city of Odense on October 15, 2015

International criticism

Public dissections are a regular occurrence at Danish zoos, where they are seen as a way of teaching children about nature.

A Copenhagen zoo prompted a storm of criticism in February last year, and its scientific director received death threats, for putting down a healthy giraffe and cutting it up in public.

Earlier this year, Odense zoo dissected a camel, pony and tapir (a creature that looks like a pig with a trunk), without sparking controversy, but Thursday's dissection was a different matter.

More than 135,000 people, most of them living outside Denmark, signed an online petition condemning the zoo's display.

"I am now embarrassed to admit that my great grandmother was 100 percent Danish after hearing of your plans to slaughter animals," Laura O'Hara from the US town of Fairfax wrote on the zoo's Facebook page.

Most comments from Danish users however defended the event, which took place during the autumn school break, as having educational value.



Zoo employees dissect a lion in the Danish city of Odense on October 15, 2015

'Valid choice'

A spokeswoman for the Humane Society International in Europe, Wendy Higgins, accused the zoo of "making a macabre spectacle" out of the lion's demise, which it blamed on the "irresponsible" over-breeding of the felines in zoos.

The Danish Animal Welfare Society, by contrast, dismissed the reaction as disproportionate.

"Millions of chickens live miserable lives. Nobody reacts," the group wrote on Twitter.

The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, for its part, defended the culling of the lion as a "scientifically valid" solution to ensuring a sustainable animal population and called the educational dissection "a valid choice".

In Denmark, where farming is an important part of the economy and children have been known to visit slaughterhouses on school tours, many people have been taken aback by the outrage over the dissections.

Copenhagen Zoo's scientific director Bengt Holst has lamented the "Disney story" shaping many people's view of [zoo](#) animals.

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