

Animals barely survive because of lack of will and money in Tirana Zoo

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Tirana, (EFE) .- The 86 animals of the Tirana public zoo, the only one in Albania, barely survive in appalling conditions due to lack of money and willingness from the authorities to ensure a more dignified management.

Lions which spend most of their day asleep, paralyzed eagles, wolves with crazy eyes, mutilated rabbits, goats and cats locked up like dangerous beasts, these are common sights at the zoo. Everything is a scenario that does not match what visitors expect from a zoo in the XXI century.

"We must close the zoo. They do not respect European standards and principles of welfare and animal handling there, criticizes in a declaration to Efe, Endri Haxhiraj, Institute for Environmental Policy of Albania.

In fact, it's up to each animal to move in a limited space of two to three square meters on a concrete floor of a pavilion without heating or cooling, which is in continuous degradation since it was built over four decades. The pair of lions suffering from stress and reproductive disorders after living 20 years locked in a cage of 50 square meters, as confirmed by even one of the 25 employees of the zoo, located south of the capital. Other animals, like many wolves have more than 10 years in captivity in a space of just 10 square meters, repeatedly flipping furiously all day, according to the protectors of animals –a symptom of madness. In addition, one of them is suffering from scabies, which harms not only their health, but can infect the visitors as well, who are separated from the animals just by a dirty rusty grate, Haxhiraj says.

Another problem is the feeding of animals. On one hand many visitors do not follow the rules of the site and give inadequate food animals, and on the other hand, the zoo authorities do not seem interested in giving the best possible food to their animals. Lions, wolves, eagles, vultures and foxes receive only donkey meat, while for other species such as ostriches, horses, rabbits and pigeons, are fed on grass, bread and water, which in total cost only 30 Euros a day, officials said at the zoo. Despite these miserable conditions, the public interest has grown to visit this zoo, which last year was attended by 70,000 people, compared to 30,000 in 2009. However, disappointment often rules for many visitors, as is the case of Katerina, a young mother who has come with his young son to see the animals in the zoo.

"I expected to see an eagle like on the flag (of Albania), but this one here does not even move its eyes," she complains. "This is not the lion, king of the jungle, I've seen in movies. I want take a picture of it, but it has been sleeping for more than an hour," the young Arjan, who has come with two other friends from the southern city of Vlora to see the rare predator.

In fact, there is lack of guidance in the zoo, the conditions of the facilities are appalling, the birds pavilion is totally ruined and reservoirs of swans have become swamps of mosquitoes.

The zoo area is a green area of 7 acres that has become a kind of island in an environment in the middle of new constructions, built without any urban criteria, which puts at risk the lives of the inhabitants.

The only "research" work the zoo has done is the forced coexistence over the last 4 months of a wolf with a domestic "Rottweiler" dog, abandoned by his master. This experience is considered "successful and innovative" by the authorities of the zoo, but has been criticized by the associations for the protection of animal rights, who argue that they are two different unrelated species.

The plight of animals could improve quickly if the plans of the Municipality of Tirana to build a modern zoo materialize soon.