



A Danish zoo is seeking unwanted pets — to feed to its predators

Aalborg Zoo said donated pets would be “gently euthanized” to help replicate the food chain of its predator animals. It accepts chickens, rabbits, guinea pigs and horses.

A zoo in Denmark has put out a call for people to donate unwanted pets and animals — including chickens, rabbits and guinea pigs — so they can be turned into feed for its predators.

Aalborg Zoo wrote on social media last week that healthy animals it receives will be “gently euthanized” by trained staff and then used as food for the predators, adding that this would help the zoo replicate its animals’ natural food chain. “That way, nothing goes to waste — and we ensure natural behavior, nutrition and well-being of our predators,” the zoo said, adding that some of its animals needed to eat “whole” prey. The zoo also accepts donations of certain horses, which are also euthanized and then used as food.

Online, critics balked at the idea of pets being fed to zoo animals, calling it a “cheap publicity stunt,” “disrespectful” and “sick,” and a policy they say could encourage pet neglect. However, others said it was a good option for people whose pets are nearing the end of their lives and a way to make sure their deaths serve a purpose.

Experts say donation can be a more cost-effective and natural way of feeding zoo animals who might otherwise be fed meat from commercial sources that can come from animals raised in poor conditions.

“If you agree to the general principle that you have carnivorous animals in a zoo, you somehow succumb to the necessity that you have to feed them animal material,” Marcus Clauss, co-director of the Clinic for Zoo Animals, Exotic Pets and Wildlife at the University of Zurich, said in an interview. “If you do this in a way that is not primarily directed at economics, but at animal welfare, you will strive to get animals that had high welfare, ideally.”

Aalborg Zoo did not immediately respond to a request for comment Tuesday. In a statement shared with the outlet Popular Science, spokeswoman Pia Nielsen said the practice of feeding carnivorous animals with smaller livestock has been used at Aalborg Zoo for many years and is common in Denmark.

“When keeping carnivores, it is necessary to provide them with meat, preferably with fur, bones, etc., to give them as natural a diet as possible. Therefore, it makes sense to allow animals that need to be euthanized for various reasons to be of use in this way,” Nielsen told Popular Science. “In Denmark, this practice is common, and many of our guests and partners appreciate the opportunity to contribute.”

Zoos in other countries also accept donations of livestock, or deceased animals, to feed their predators. The Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary in New Mexico, for example, states on its website that it accepts donations of “livestock that has passed away or needs to be humanely euthanized” to feed its wolves and recommends donation over “having to dispose of the deceased in a landfill, or go through the costly process of cremation.” The Alaska Zoo in Anchorage recently put out a call for frozen meat and fish donations for its animals.

Clauss said that when horses are slaughtered, “you have a huge amount of animal — meat, bones, etc. — that goes to waste in our system because it’s not used by humans.” He said he supports zoos offering people the option of donating their horses if the alternative is that zoos purchase horsemeat to feed their carnivores. “Why not get it that way directly?”

Clauss acknowledged concerns that encouraging people to donate animals might mean fewer unwanted pets are placed in shelters. But he said pet shelters in many countries, including the United States, are overcrowded and can’t always ensure optimal conditions for the pets in their care, so that option might not guarantee a higher welfare for the unwanted animals. And he said that forcing someone who doesn’t want or can’t afford their pet to keep them may also not be good for the animal.

“People who want to get rid of their animals will find a way of doing that,” he said.

In response to the call for donations by the Aalborg Zoo, several Facebook users wrote that they took their horses to be donated there and praised the zoo’s handling of their animals, while others wrote that they were planning to donate their horses in the future.

It was not immediately clear how the donated animals would be euthanized. On Facebook, the zoo said trained professionals worked to make the deaths as quick and painless as possible.