

Pymatuning Deer Park

804 E. Jamestown Rd., Jamestown, PA 16134

Pymatuning Deer Park has failed to meet minimum federal standards for the care of animals used for exhibition, as established by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Among other violations, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited Pymatuning for failing to provide animals with adequate veterinary care, sufficient space, protection from the elements, proper handling, safe and clean enclosures, clean water, adequate barriers, and food free from the risk of contamination. Contact PETA for documentation.

July 8, 2025: The USDA issued Pymatuning a critical citation for failing to properly handle primates, resulting in the death of four marmosets. The monkeys were found dead in their enclosure on June 23, 2025. They were housed in a tall glass structure with glass skylights on a covered wooden boardwalk. The temperature had reached 89 degrees, and the enclosure lacked additional ventilation or cooling methods. The necropsy submission form submitted by the attending veterinarian noted that the animals were found dead in the morning with evidence of bleeding from the nose and mouth, and that it was suspected to be a heat-related death.

July 18, 2024: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to house guinea pigs in indoor housing facilities; failing to have a written program for environment enhancement for birds; and failing to maintain at least 3 feet between the perimeter fence and the African crested porcupine enclosure to

ensure that they had protection from unauthorized persons and animals. The perimeter fence was only 10 inches from the enclosure fencing.

February 16, 2023: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to keep Blackie, a wolf-dog hybrid, up-to-date on her rabies vaccination. She was due for the update in May of 2022 but had not received it. It was also cited for failing to maintain fencing in good repair to protect the animals from injury and contain them. The rear of the zebra and cattle pens had various areas of damage due to fallen trees. In the zebra enclosure, a large tree had fallen onto the wooden fencing, breaking seven of the horizontal boards. In the adjacent cattle pasture, a tree was in the process of falling onto the wooden fence, resulting in numerous missing and leaning boards.

October 13, 2017: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to provide adequate veterinary care to a juvenile lion with signs of decreased muscle mass in the hind end, ataxia, and a 1-inch-by-1-inch lesion on his right hip.

May 31, 2017: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to provide adequate veterinary care to a fallow deer whose left eye was clouded, blue, and bulging, and to two Fennec foxes who had moderate hair loss on their backs. It was also cited for failing to keep the enclosure fencing for the fallow deer in good repair, failing to provide mineral and salt blocks in the nilgai enclosure in a manner that prevents contamination, failing to clean feeding pans for lions and the cylinder used to feed hay to elk (inspectors observed a buildup of old hay, grime, and debris), failing to clean several shelter areas—including for fallow deer and nilgai—that had an accumulation of feces, failing to clean the camel barn, and failing to remove trash from the white-tailed

deer enclosure.

June 22, 2016: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to remove a decomposed animal carcass from a fallow deer enclosure, failing to clean several water receptacles—including for the fallow deer, nilgai, lions, and tigers—that were covered with algae and debris, and failing to maintain in good repair the perimeter fence of the enclosure holding fallow deer. It had a gap between the ground and the bottom of the fence large enough to allow smaller deer to escape or other animals to enter.

April 13, 2016: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to remove an accumulation of carcass material from the cougar enclosure and failing to clean the enclosures that held black-and-white lemurs, olive baboons, and African crested porcupines. The enclosures all contained a buildup of food and fecal material.

February 8, 2016: The USDA issued an official warning to Pymatuning for previously issued citations. This document warned that any further violations of the regulations could result in the assessment of a civil penalty, criminal prosecution, and/or suspension or revocation of the exhibitor's license.

January 26, 2016: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain the fencing separating paddocks holding fallow deer. The wire fencing was broken, and sharp points protruded from the fence. The facility was also cited for failing to clean animal enclosures. The indoor and outdoor nilgai enclosures contained a buildup of waste, and the enclosures holding lions and tigers had an accumulation of carcass materials.

November 2, 2015: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain the

fencing in the primary enclosure holding water buffaloes and cattle, and failing to maintain in good repair the bucket used for drinking water in the wolf enclosure. It was chewed around the edges, preventing it from being effectively cleaned and sanitized.

August 27, 2015: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have an updated program of veterinary care. The 2012 program that it was using listed gunshot and barbiturate overdose as the primary forms of euthanasia, but the current guidelines provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association indicate that gunshot is only to be used in emergency situations. The August 5, 2015, euthanasia of Scruffy, an adult tiger, was performed by gunshot. After facility representatives noticed his health declining rapidly, the veterinarian visually inspected him, indicated the likely diagnosis was renal failure, and recommended that a facility representative perform euthanasia by gunshot, as the veterinarian couldn't sedate or euthanize him properly at the time. No diagnostics were performed that may have provided a medically manageable diagnosis, and no necropsy was performed to determine his illness. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to handle animals properly, as a juvenile lion was unable to escape the sound of gunshots when Scruffy was "euthanized" in an enclosed area. The lion may have sustained trauma to the eardrums from the three shots fired from a high-caliber rifle.

The USDA also cited Pymatuning for failing to recognize the abnormal behavior of two 5-month-old bear cubs, which included paw- and ear-sucking. When questioned, the facility representative stated that all the hand-reared cubs exhibited this behavior and that park officials didn't recognize it as an abnormal behavior pattern; as a result, this information had never been conveyed

to the attending veterinarian for it to be addressed.

The USDA also cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain several enclosures used to hold primates. The holding area used for the baboons had rusted metal panels, and enclosures holding primates had exposed nails as well as wood that was no longer sealed and impervious to moisture. The facility was also cited for failing to clean the zebra and bear enclosures, as well as the baboon holding area, which contained rodent droppings. The facility was also issued a repeat citation for failing to have an effective rodent-control program. It was using rat poison, creating a concern that a rodent could die inside the holding area, exposing a baboon to the dead rodent and the poison. The facility was also issued a repeat citation for failing to maintain the enclosure holding muntjacs (large pipes were coming out of the ground in front of the shelter that could potentially injure their legs), failing to maintain in good repair the freezer storing meat products for the carnivores (it was missing the seal on the door in some areas), and feeding unpalatable frozen meat items that are subject to contamination to animals. Finally, the facility was issued a repeat citation for failing to provide the adult female black bear with a mechanism for adequately shedding out her winter coat and a pad, hay, or bedding to allow her to get off the concrete as well as for failing to provide the two bear cubs with sufficient space to make normal “social adjustments.” They were denied access to a back den area and kept on exhibit, which consisted of a concrete pad enclosure with a small pool and “toddler type plastic structure.”

July 20, 2015: The USDA issued direct citations to Pymatuning for failing to provide several animals with adequate veterinary care. A female adult lion injured a juvenile

lion on his hindquarters. After contacting the veterinarian, it was determined that a course of antibiotics was appropriate, but the vet hadn’t assessed the lion to determine the extent of his injury. A 15-year-old bear was reluctant to walk on her front left leg, and while gathering food, she crawled using her elbow. The facility indicated that the bear had seemed arthritic for a while, but a veterinarian had not been contacted to determine the cause or develop a treatment plan. In addition, the adult male capybara was limping, and the musculature of his left hind leg showed a moderate amount of atrophy associated with the limited use. The facility didn’t contact the vet to determine the cause or develop a treatment plan.

The USDA also issued direct citations to Pymatuning for failing to provide a juvenile lion with enough light for a diurnal light cycle, and there wasn’t sufficient light to see him well enough for a routine inspection and cleaning. The facility was also cited for failing to clean this holding area—it was extremely soiled, and the animal was kept in unsanitary conditions. The lion was placed inside this enclosure on May 22, and workers hadn’t been able to enter it to remove food and fecal matter since then. There were also rotting “meat/carcasses” in the enclosure. The facility was also issued a direct citation for failing to have a sufficient number of employees for the daily husbandry care of the animals (there were two employees to care for more than 200 animals) and failing to separate incompatible animals. After the female adult lion attacked the juvenile male, they were separated by keeping the female in the outdoor exhibit and the male in the holding area. However, because of this arrangement, neither animal could be moved, so the animals and their enclosures weren’t being cleaned properly.

The USDA also cited Pymatuning for multiple repeat violations, including failing to keep the area surrounding the primates and other animals clean and free of excessive clutter, an exorbitant number of fruit flies in the holding areas around the lemurs, a missing seal along the meat freezer door, feeding unpalatable frozen meat items that are subject to contamination, failing to discuss dietary plans with the attending veterinarian, failing to replace rusted metal panels and unsealed wood in enclosures holding baboons and other primates (they couldn't be effectively sanitized), and failing to clean the shelter area in the enclosure housing the capybara, which contained cobwebs, dust, debris hanging from the ceiling almost to the tops of the animals' heads, and an excessive accumulation of feces.

The facility was also cited with a repeat violation for keeping bears in an enclosure that didn't allow them to engage in species-appropriate behavior, such as swimming, climbing, and digging. Both bears still had much of their winter coats because there was nothing for them to rub against to remove the excess fur, except for concrete. The enclosure had concrete floors, and the inspector stated that one of the bears showed signs of painful movement and debility consistent with being housed exclusively on concrete.

Pymatuning was also cited for failing to have an adequate barrier around the coat and cougar enclosures, failing to have attendants present at all times during public contact with animals, failing to offer environmental enrichment to two ring-tailed lemurs who were housed in a holding area (one was bouncing off the enclosure's sides in an agitated state), and failing to keep the fencing secure around the enclosure housing the muntjac. The enclosure had large pipes coming out of the ground that

could potentially cause injuries. At the time of the inspection, a muntjac had escaped and was in the capybara enclosure.

June 21, 2015: According to the *Erie Times-News*, a former employee of Pymatuning filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court against Bruce Sankey, former manager of the park; his wife, Rachelle Sankey, the owner of the park; and Reigleman Enterprises Inc., the corporation that operated Pymatuning, seeking civil damages for the sexual abuse that she endured as a 14-year-old working at the roadside zoo in 2011. Bruce Sankey, who was 41 when the abuse took place, is serving a 10- to 20-year sentence in state prison after pleading no contest in 2014 to one count of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a person younger than 16. The lawsuit alleged that Rachelle Sankey witnessed her husband's abuse and harassment of the girl and tried to dissuade her from reporting it. Rachelle Sankey was charged with hindering the prosecution and intimidating a witness for encouraging the girl not to report the crime. In March 2015, she was placed in the Accelerated Rehabilitation Disposition program for 12 months.

May 23, 2015: The USDA cited Pymatuning with a repeat citation for failing to have a veterinarian-approved diet plan to shift two 6-week-old tiger cubs to solid food.

May 13, 2015: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have the veterinarian re-evaluate the diets for the white tiger and a leopard, both of whom appeared to be obese with no visible neck and with fat deposits over their spines and distended abdomens; failing to have an appropriate enrichment plan for several primates, including marmosets and Sykes' monkeys who were suffering from hair loss and displaying stereotypic behavior indicating

that they were dealing with stress or a lack of stimulation in the environment; and failing to maintain several items in the enclosures holding primates. The swing in the holding area used for the ring-tailed lemur was cracked and in disrepair. The metal in a holding area used for baboons was rusted, pitted, and in disrepair in some areas. Additionally, a nail protruded into an enclosure holding primates. The facility was also cited for failing to provide marmosets with adequate shelter from sunlight. They were being held in a “Plexiglas cylinder type enclosure” with “no hide box or shelter available for the animals to get into to [get] away from the sun when it is directly overhead.”

The USDA also cited Pymatuning for failing to clean the winter holding area for primates (it held building materials, excess crates and clutter, and dirty, empty enclosures), having an excessive number of fruit flies in the holding areas for the spider monkey and lemurs, failing to maintain the freezer that stored meat products for the carnivores (some areas of the door were missing a seal, causing it not to close properly), feeding big cats frozen chicken that is unpalatable to animals and subject to contamination, not providing the big cats with the supplements listed in the current diet plan, failing to clean the shelter area used for the capybaras (it contained an “excessive accumulation of feces” and “cobwebs, dust, and debris hanging from the ceiling” and almost to the tops of the animals’ heads), and failing to provide the two capybaras (aquatic rodents) with a large enough pool. They were provided with a small metal tub that allowed only one animal to stand in it at a time. The tub didn’t contain water at the time of the inspection.

February 11, 2015: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to provide fallow deer with sufficient shelter from extreme

temperatures and inclement weather (there was only one structure, which was approximately 16 feet by 8 feet, for 83 deer) and failing to provide two black bears with clean water. The source of water for the enclosure was a pond-like structure that had an excessive amount of green to black algae and organic material on the inside and surrounding surfaces.

August 21, 2014: The USDA issued repeat citations to Pymatuning for failing to maintain the primary enclosure fences in enclosures holding big cats. There were gaps in the enclosure that were large enough for the tigers to reach their paws through. At the back of the enclosure holding lions, the ground had eroded away, creating a gap approximately 6 inches high and 37 inches long between the ground and the fence, which was large enough for lions’ paws to reach through, risking injury to the animals and employees. The facility was also cited for failing to supply an adequate diet for three Nubian goat kids who were in poor body condition—the bones of the hip and the spine markedly protruded.

June 12, 2013: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have an adequate barrier fence surrounding the cougar enclosure, failing to provide adequate ventilation in the indoor housing area of the tiger and lion enclosures (it smelled strongly of ammonia), and failing to maintain the primary enclosure fence in big-cat enclosures. The support brace for the barbed-wire “kick-in” used around the enclosure holding tigers was bent, causing the barbed wire to become loose. The gate to the tiger enclosure had eroded away from the ground, creating a gap of 6 inches, and at the back of the lion enclosure, the ground had eroded away, creating a gap of approximately 6 inches between the ground and the fence. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to maintain the perimeter fence

surrounding the lion and tiger enclosures. Several sections had gaps where the ground had eroded away from the bottom, and there was no support bar or wire along the bottom edge of the fence.

January 7, 2013: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have a responsible adult available to accompany officials during the inspection process.

September 24, 2012: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have a responsible adult available to accompany officials during the inspection process.

April 11, 2012: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have a complete program of veterinary care; failing to maintain the gibbon and ring-tailed lemur enclosures, which were constructed of excessively rusty panels; failing to have a primate enrichment plan with species-specific details for the individually housed gibbon and the baboons; failing to clean the enclosure holding the gibbon, which had an accumulation of feces (the gibbon also had an accumulation of fecal material on their bottom); failing to have an effective “pest”-control program (there was a moderate population of fruit flies in the warm room that held several species of primates and several other animals); failing to have sufficient “kick-ins” for the enclosures holding big cats to reduce the risk of escape; failing to have an attending veterinarian–approved diet plan for the large carnivores; and failing to have an effective perimeter fence. Sections had “tree/limb” damage, a section surrounding the lion and tiger enclosures had an 8-inch gap underneath, and the section near the fallow deer had moderate to heavy vines growing on it.

August 15, 2011: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to provide three

juvenile wolves with sufficient space. They were held in an enclosure that measured approximately 10 feet by 10 feet. The inspector wrote, “These wolves require additional space to allow them to make normal postural adjustments and to avoid the potential of fighting over lack of space.”

March 10, 2011: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to provide veterinary care to an older female wolf who had an injury to the left side of her face and for failing to maintain the resting platform in the enclosure housing three lions. The lions had pulled the metal flashing loose, risking potential injury to them.

November 16, 2010: The USDA issued an official warning for the September 30, 2010, citation of failing to provide the deer with potable water.

September 30, 2010: The USDA issued Pymatuning a repeat direct citation for failing to provide the deer with clean water. The water bucket was excessively dirty and was growing algae.

September 1, 2010: The USDA issued Pymatuning a direct citation for confining rabbits to a primary enclosure with other animals. At the time of the inspection, they were running loose and sharing pens and food with most of the hoofstock. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to maintain fencing. The fence used to separate groups of hoofstock was suffering from erosion and water damage, and a tree had come down across the top, adding to the damage. A tree hit a section of fence in the area where elk and white-tailed deer were held, and it was too low to prevent an escape. A fence between the elk and white-tailed deer was severely torn up and had some sharp edges. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to maintain its perimeter fence adequately. A back gate to the park had a 1-foot

clearance between its bottom and the ground. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to provide a shelter that would accommodate all seven elk during severe weather, a direct citation for failing to have a clean bucket for water in the enclosure holding deer (the one provided was excessively dirty, and algae was growing in it), and a repeat citation for failing to maintain the area outside the feed-storage building, which had a buildup of old clutter, odd items, feed from the bin that had solidified and crusted on the ground, "out-of-use" feed, and water tubs with standing water in them.

August 2, 2010: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain the fence separating groups of hoofstock in the petting area (it had erosion and water damage, and a tree had come down across the top, adding to the damage) and a repeat citation for failing to clean the area where the hay was stored. There were cobwebs as well as dirty cages and other items stacked up that could provide rodents and other "pests" with ready shelter.

August 6, 2009: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to clean areas around the hay feeders in a pen holding sheep and goats and in the area used for horses, both of which had an excessive buildup of feces and other muck.

August 14, 2008: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain drugs in date to prevent medical problems for the animals and failing to store food in a manner that protects it from spoilage and contamination. There was an open bag of feed and an open container of monkey chow in the area holding lemurs and coatis. An open bag of feed for the anteater was being stored in a filthy refrigerator, the feed-storage area needed a thorough cleaning, and the "hay/straw" area contained large

amounts of pigeon droppings. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to supply safe feed receptacles for cattle, goats, and sheep (three of the receptacles were old, rusty, half-cut drums that had rough edges); failing to supply the mountain lions with a clean and sanitary water dish (the one provided was badly rusted); and failing to keep the area around the chinchillas free of clutter. The excessive buildup of clutter created an area conducive to rodents.

June 19, 2008: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have primates, anteaters, sloths, hedgehogs, porcupines, coatis, pigs, and cattle listed on the program of veterinary care.

April 17, 2008: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have a perimeter fence of sufficient height to protect the animals and for failing to have adequate ventilation in the off-exhibit winter housing used to hold primates, camels, and other species, as the ammonia level was excessive.

July 19, 2007: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to have the records for animals on hand available for review.

August 5, 2004: The USDA cited Pymatuning for failing to maintain fence posts, which were loose at the base and not supporting the fence in the petting zoo area; failing to clean the shelters in the pen holding zebras, zebus, and elk, which had an excessive buildup of wet bedding, mud, and feces; and failing to clean the feed and bedding storage area. There was a deep layer of loose hay and straw on the floor that needed to be removed, cobwebs on the wall, and a bag of feed supplement that was damp.

July 30, 2003: The USDA issued repeat citations to Pymatuning for failing to have a

complete program of veterinary care and for failing to have a complete written program for environmental enhancement to promote the psychological well-being of primates. Pymatuning was also cited for failing to keep rabbits and chickens in separate enclosures; failing to clean shelters for the zebras and zebus, which had accumulated a very deep layer of feces, hay, and debris; and failing to maintain the fence wire of a pen in the petting zoo. The fencing had a large hole with sharp wire ends that animals could get caught on.

August 6, 2002: The USDA issued Pymatuning repeat citations for failing to have a complete program of veterinary care and failing to have a complete written program for environmental enhancement to promote the psychological well-being of the primates.

November 1, 2000: The USDA cited Pymatuning for housing a gibbon and spider monkey in enclosures that were short of the required height guidelines for brachiating species and issued repeat citations for failing to dispose of expired drugs and storing chemicals such as “rat bait” and paints in the drug cabinet.