

Samutprakarn Crocodile Farm

First Visit: 17th June 2015

Straight through the entrance was a male tiger pacing on a short chain for photos. Worse, he was tethered a mere 2m away from two baby chimpanzees who were dressed up in what was probably meant to be cute. It didn't look like the tiger got much rest. The pacing was incessant, however there was no one around wanting photos so it was unclear how the staff treated him in order to get those photos.

A few hundred crocodiles in cramped concrete cages later, and there was finally a tiny little sign directing our researchers towards "white tiger". Out at the back of the zoo, passed a very morbid stuffed crocodile collection, was a cage of four tigers, an older male and female and two young (maybe 18 month old) female cubs. The cage was surprisingly large, not adequate by any means but better than expected given the state of the rest of the zoo, measuring around 10x10m and contained a pond, some toys and a naturalistic rock display complete with places to jump, climb and hide and even a couple of logs for scratching. No natural vegetation however, and the size far from adequate to house four tigers. Then the tigers themselves. The adult male was a golden tiger, the female white, as in pure white, stripes barely visible and very cross-eyed.

The two younger cubs; one was regular orange and the other yet another golden. Clearly a fair amount of inbreeding is going on here. They were all very responsive and easy to engage however, which was a good sign, but desperate for attention and the small pieces of grass that our researchers gave them through the bars.

Our researchers headed around the zoo, a trip that did not yield much else positive; orangutans and chimps lived in squalid concrete prisons, no enrichment or food just rubbish from tourists, and the elephants fared worst; the standard chain around the ankle and depressed swaying elephant.

Our researchers finally came to one area labelled lions and tigers and bears and surprisingly found a number of large enclosures complete with grass, ponds/moats, caves and platforms; an unexpected surprise albeit a little run down. Only one tiger was visible poking its head from the cage at the back but at least it was something.

Almost instantly however, the pleasant surprise was marred by finding an open door with a sign above saying 'breeding area'. Upon a quick scan of the area it was revealed that there was a leopard, a sun bear (neither species were on display in the zoo) and two tigers. Two German Shepherds were also locked in a cage at the back near to other, un-investigated cages.

Heading to the exit our researchers found another cage. Six tigers were held in a weird cage that looked like something out of a circus. No water, no platforms, no enrichment, just concrete and bars. This group was again younger tigers 18 months to 2 years and were once again, responsive to our researchers. Two more golden tigers, one white, one white with no stripes and two regular orange. Definitely some serious inbreeding going on here. Golden and stripeless white tigers don't occur without it.

Overall, the zoo is in a rather poor state of welfare with only the positive that the majority of the tigers were still friendly and responsive. Interestingly too, WAP's recent report stated they saw 4 tigers, our researchers' count was 14. Now that's a big difference in numbers. A revisit is scheduled.

Second Visit: 17th September 2016

At the entrance, the same male tiger was chained up for photos, and still right next to baby chimpanzees. More worrying was that on the opposite side there were seven very young cubs, ranging from about 6 weeks to 16 weeks old (the previous visit it had been empty). All were kept in small inadequate cages with no food or water. The adverts did display the possibility of feeding them at an extra cost. Our researchers did not see a single person partake in either the feeding or the photo with the adult tiger. More interestingly, out of the 7 young cubs, 3 were golden tiger cubs which only occurs through inbreeding.

Our researchers then went to the cage where previously had been the white cross eyed female with golden male and two cubs. She was no longer there and was not seen her anywhere in the zoo complex. Instead there were three large male tigers, again one golden, one white and one white and stripeless (dubbed snow) - their ages matched with the teen cubs seen on the previous visit - they may be the same group.

The circus cage that had held the teenage tigers last time was filled with teens again, and again 6 of them. This time just two white tigers and 4 regular orange cubs. All lazing about and still nothing to occupy them in this barren cage.

The Breeding centre area to be locked this time. Our researchers were able to look over the wall and see the same area as before. This time the place looked empty, every cage bare and derelict. No sign even of the dogs.

Next were the enclosures. A positive here - instead of the one enclosure with a lone tiger peering into it as had been the case last time, there were now three large enclosures being used. All had large ponds or moats, grassy areas, trees, rocks even caves for hiding. The tigers all looked relaxed and at peace in these areas. There were still no enrichment items provided and the one of the enclosures definitely needed a little clean up with old bits of rusty looking fencing just lying about.

The first enclosure held five tigers, two golden (male and female), one white female and a two regular orange tigers (male and female). Most chilling out but two of the females were having a lot of fun chasing things in the large moat, whether they were chasing fish or making their own entertainment is unclear. The second enclosure held one white male and an orange female, another orange tiger (guessing female) could be seen in the lock down area - probably rotated through at some point.

The last area held an orange pair, which our researchers believe were the breeding pair seen on the first visit inside the Breeding facility area. They looked relaxed and were responsive to chuffing. As in fact most of the tigers were very responsive and interactive.

Whilst there were some positives in the new enclosures and large spaces, it was clear that a lot of breeding and inbreeding was still

happening. the sudden boom in tiger numbers is also a concern, the previous number being 14 and a year later a whopping 27. And let's not forget that the white cross eyed girl was nowhere to be seen (though it's a guess she's a breeder and could be being housed elsewhere). Our researchers also heard a baby tiger crying at the front area but were unable to see it leading them to suspect the tiger count to be higher than 27.

Third Visit: 16th February 2017

For the first time on arrival the adult male tiger was not out for photos. When questioning staff our researchers were informed this was because he was "on holiday". However, he could be seen sleeping in the small cage just behind the photo area. At least it appears he does get a break on occasion.

There were three regular orange cubs available for the bottle feeding experience and this time a few tourists did participate in this. The woman in charge was very matter-of-fact but did not manhandle the cubs but rather moved them around in a much more gentle fashion. One in particular was distressed in the cage though, crying and pacing incessantly - it also looked younger than the other one.

The cage around the side still held the same three males -one white, one snow and one golden. The cage, as on previous visits, was spotless, with a cleaner actually in the process of cleaning and changing the water. An addition to this cage was the provision of microchip numbers possibly inline with the recent Department of National Parks crack down.

The strange circus cage near the crocodiles once again held sub-adult tigers. Once again there were six tiger cubs - four orange and two white and there were microchip signs for all six tigers. Again, the cage was clean but barren and only water was provided.

In the breeding centre area there were only leopards and bears visible.

The first of the large enclosures held just two orange tigers - it looked like a mating pair. The water was cleaner than normal and the female was amusing herself by playing with logs and chunks of driftwood. The second enclosure held one white male and an orange female. The male showed interest in the female next door, pacing along the

adjoining fence with her. He had multiple sores particularly on his hips. The female in her own enclosure paced and then rested.

Moving to the second section - previous visits the first of these had held a lion, there were now four young cubs in the enclosure. They appeared a little more timid and not so playful as some of the other cubs. Next to this there was also another enclosure, which had held a breeding pair though on this occasion only the male was observed.

Enclosures were, for the most part unkempt, filthy in places and littered with old bits of fencing. While there was a lot of natural vegetation (some enclosures had more than others) there wasn't really anywhere for the tigers to hide. The only enrichment items were a series of logs otherwise no enrichment was present in both cage and enclosure. Cages were all still barren though very clean and clean water was available to all.

Lots of pacing was observed and in some cases there were also signs of over-licking and grooming as well as excessive chuffing. There were a number of wounds and sores noted with some of the tigers displaying lameness. There was still a large number of cross eyed tigers as well as the colour variations, both of which can indicate inbreeding.

Fourth Visit: 6th April 2018

Once again, Kai Kim (Sp?), the old photo prop tiger was out for photos. He appears much worse in physical health, limping heavily and with many sores on his body. Staff report him as being 19 years old which would explain the issues.

Opposite him, in the small cages were two regular orange cubs sitting there for bottle feeding. As with cubs kept in here before, they seemed distressed and paced constantly. It was hot and there was no water in the cage with them. On exiting, our researchers did notice that a fan had been placed in front of the cage in an attempt to keep the cubs slightly cooler. In a section behind the cubs, our researchers noted movement and saw that there was another, largish tiger hidden in a small transport cage at the back out of sight. It is unclear as to why this tiger is here - breeding or other reasons.

The circus cage by the crocodiles had just two regular orange sub-adults inside; these could have been the young cubs from the year

before. As with all other times, the cage was barren, with only water available.

The breeding area looked more deserted but there was a swaying Moon Bear in one of the cages at the back. Cages nearest the enclosure were filthy, filled with faeces leading our researchers to believe that the tigers were kept in here once the zoo was closed.

The first enclosure once again held six adult tigers this time two regular orange, two white and two golden. The tigers were very active, playing with each other and chasing about. The second enclosure held two orange adults and the the third had two white tigers and an orange tiger. The enclosure had not changed much and still contained the large, dirty pond, grass, trees and old fencing.

The second enclosure area had three sub-adult tigers - two orange and one white and the enclosure next to that had what appeared to be the same orange breeding pair as the previous visit.

The final cage, round the side of the zoo continued to contain the three males - the golden, white and snow of previous years.

Welfare levels are being maintained at a low standard. What is also concerning is the continued production of cubs yet the number of tigers remains the same or even decreases. Many tigers seen on previous visits have not been seen again.

Fifth Visit: 11th April 2019

For the most part, everything was the same as the year before. The only difference was in the number of tigers in each enclosure. There was a vast drop in the numbers of tigers seen and also in the number given by staff. It seems that a large number (at least ten or more) are no longer in the zoo.

Overall the body condition of these tigers was poor. Many were seen limping and there were large wounds observed on others. Behaviour varied between tigers with some demonstrating positive play behaviours in the large enclosures, while others in the small barren cages were seen pacing.

No enrichment was seen and there was dirty water provided to tigers.