



FAQ's about Little Ray's Nature Centre

Little Ray's Nature Centre was founded 23 years ago as a local, family-based, reptile rescue and educational outreach program.

Since then they have grown to be the largest exotic animal rescue and largest public education program in the country, with two centres open to the public in Ontario and outreach programs which reach 1-2 million Canadians each year (not including reach on social media, radio, etc.). Their outreach programs include a comprehensive set of curriculum-based workshops for schools, museum exhibits and Canada's largest pet therapy program, among many others.

Little Ray's Nature Centres are nationally accredited by the Canadian Association of Accredited Zoos and Aquariums and licenced by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Little Ray's is one of the only institutions recognized and allowed by the city of Ottawa to work with prohibited animals.

They are partners with the OSPCA in the care of and placement of seized exotic pets, taking in hundreds of unwanted and seized pets each year across Canada – a very costly endeavor. For instance, Little Ray's spends tens of thousands of dollars each year solely on relocating rescued crocodilians to proper sanctuaries and zoos across the world. The funding for their rescue efforts is generated entirely by outreach programs; there is currently no public funding or grants available for these efforts.

Overview of Accreditation

Little Ray's Nature Centres are one of only a few nationally accredited zoological facilities in Canada. While there are hundreds of facilities that house and work with exotic animal in Canada, only a small fraction of these meet the standards for national accreditation by CAZA (The Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums). National zoological accreditation is a full review of an institutions practices, policies, and animal care standards. The process takes a minimum of one full year to complete and for many institutions it takes several years to complete and to raise their standards to meet this highest benchmark of excellence in animal care. This accreditation process is done by a team of zoological and veterinary experts from the top institutions in Canada.

Other useful information:

- Re-inspections by CAZA every 2.5-5 years and for every new facility opened.
- Veterinary inspections of the animal collection which happen a minimum of every two weeks.
- SPCA inspections twice a year, at both permanent facilities and at off-site educational programs.
- Ongoing engagement with other accredited institutions to cross reference and compare animal care standards, veterinary standards, etc.

Overview of Animal Care and Welfare Standards

- Each species or group of species in Little Ray's care has a care guide which details all aspects of care including diet, housing, substrate, supplementation and enrichment.
- Each species or group of species in Little Ray's care has a handling guide which details how an animal can be safely removed from its enclosure, transported, handled and what the acceptable options are for public

interaction (if any). Each guide also includes a list of signs of stress to watch out for and other concerns specific to that group of animals.

- Each individual animal that comes into Little Ray's care undergoes a quarantine period during which veterinarian(s) assess the physical condition of the animal as well as its behavior. During this time Little Ray's staff also assesses the animal's behavior to determine where the animal can be appropriately placed. Some animals that come into care are not well socialized and are nervous around people while others are well socialized, not nervous around people and sometimes even actively seek contact and company. Future placements of animals depend on this behavioral assessment.
- No animal that exhibits stress around the public may be placed into any outreach or educational program.
- If an animal's behavior ever changes or if there is any concern about stress, then that animal is removed from educational programming until in Little Ray's senior staff and/or veterinarian(s) can re-assess the animal in question.
- All staff in Little Ray's educational department undergo a training program that covers the safe handling of each animal. This training covers all relevant topics related to the safety of the animal and the safety of the public.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Are these animals from the wild?

None of the animals in Little Ray's Nature Centres are wild animals. All of them were born in human care and the majority of them are actually rescued pets. Any animal that comes to Little Ray's that is eligible for release into the wild is always released into the wild – **100% of the time**. One of the main parts of our public messaging stresses the importance of keeping wild animals wild and **not** taking animals from the wild.

2. Are the animals stressed?

No. It is strictly against Little Ray's policies to bring out any animals that are stressed by the experience. Any animal showing signs of stress must be taken out of Little Ray's outreach programs and get re-evaluated by senior staff.

3. How do you know if an animal is stressed?

There are several behavioural and physiological signs of stress that Little Ray's (and THEMUSEUM's) staff look out for. Before any animal is placed in an outreach program, a behavioral assessment of that animal must conclude that it is well socialized and exhibits no sign of stress around people. A mandatory part of our training program includes signs of stress for all species that a handler is permitted to work with.

4. How do we get in contact with Little Ray's if we have further questions?

The best place to reach Little Ray's is through their Facebook page as they have people dedicated to replying on social media every day. Little Ray's can also be reached by email at info@lrnc.ca.