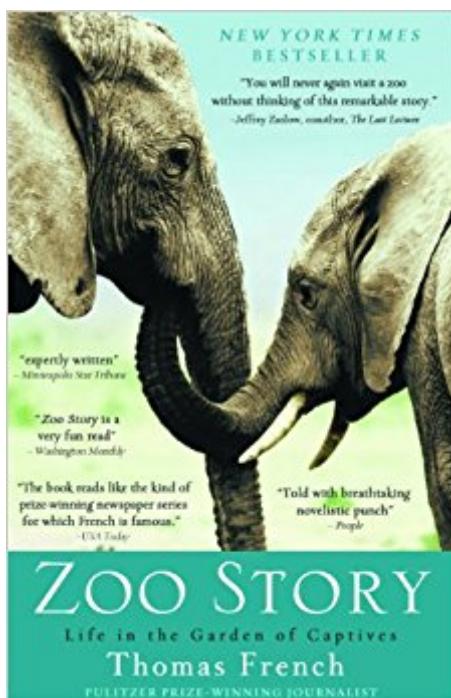


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# Zoo Story: Life In The Garden Of Captives



## Synopsis

"This story, told by a master teller of such things, does more than take you inside the cages, fences, and walls of a zoo. It takes you inside the human heart, and an elephant's, and a primate's, and on and on. Tom French did in this book what he always does. He took real life and wrote it down for us, with eloquence and feeling and aching detail."-Rick Bragg, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and bestselling author"An insightful and detailed look at the complex life of a zoo and its denizens, both animal and human."-Yann Martel, author of *Life of Pi* and *Beatrice and Virgil*Welcome to the savage and surprising world of *Zoo Story*, an unprecedented account of the secret life of a zoo and its inhabitants. Based on six years of research, the book follows a handful of unforgettable characters at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo: an alpha chimp with a weakness for blondes, a ferocious tiger who revels in Obsession perfume, and a brilliant but tyrannical CEO known as El Diablo Blanco. The sweeping narrative takes the reader from the African savannah to the forests of Panama and deep into the inner workings of a place some describe as a sanctuary and others condemn as a prison. *Zoo Story* shows us how these remarkable individuals live, how some die, and what their experiences reveal about the human desire to both exalt and control nature.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist French goes behind the scenes at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo in this absorbing and balanced account that reveals extinction, conservation, and captivity issues in all their moral complexities and featuring a very memorable cast. The author introduces readers to Herman, the lovable species-confused chimpanzee who has reigned at Lowry Park for three

decades; Enshalla, whose family history was like a Greek tragedy, and her mate Eric, Sumatran tigers whose attempts at mating captivate the zoo staff; Ladybug, the black bear who likes oranges and peanut butter; Lex Salisbury, the ambitious CEO who holds the fate of the zoo animals and humans in his hands; and the trainers who witness the circle of life and death among their charges. We are forced to reconsider our notions of freedom and captivity when presented with such scenarios as 11 partially sedated wild South African elephants being moved to U.S. zoos to escape slaughter at home. A thoughtful and moving but unsentimental portrait of life in captivity and a broad introduction to some of its most salientâ "and intractableâ "dilemmas. (July) Copyright Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

French knows the Lowry Park Zoo story better than anyone else, and his writing on the subject is engaging and instructive, particularly when he describes the behind-the-scenes politics that determines what 175 million Americans see every year on their visits. French adroitly mixes the sordid details of Lowry Park with a "big-picture" approach, avoiding the finger-pointing and polemic that so often accompanies discussions of zoos. The most difficult thing about reading Zoo Story is coming to terms with some hard truths about wildlife conservation--for example, are possible solutions worse than the problem? "All zoos, even the most enlightened," French points out, "are built upon an idea both beguiling and repellent--the notion that we seek out the wildness of the world and behold its beauty, but that we must first contain that wildness." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I've always felt conflicted about zoos. On the one hand, I enjoy seeing the animals up close and personal. On the other hand, I always feel guilty. No matter how big or "friendly" their habitat, I still feel a bit melancholy when I see magnificent wild animals living their lives in such an unnatural way. Then I try to make myself feel better by telling myself that they might be better off in a zoo--safe from poachers and other dangers found in the wild. In short, like many others, I have a love/hate relationship with zoos. So when I saw journalist Thomas French's book, Zoo Story: Life in the Garden of Captives, that purported to give an inside look at Tampas' Lowry Park Zoo, I snapped it up immediately. In addition to my curiosity about the inner workings of a zoo, I was also drawn to this book because we visited Lowry Park Zoo several times, and I always enjoy reading about places I've been to in real life. I was able to picture many of the places he described--and remember watching the baby elephant whose conception and birth is described in the book. This book tells

many stories--including the rise and fall of the zoo's controversial CEO Lex Salisbury to the reign and tragic ends of the zoo's "king" and "queen" (Herman the Orangutan and Enshalla the Tiger). The book opens with the transport of a group of elephants from Swaziland, Africa to Florida. Using the acquisition and journey of the elephants to highlight some of the issues and controversies surrounding zoos, French highlights the reasons why so many of us are conflicted about zoos. He tells how the elephants are losing their native habitat through their own voracious appetites and why this perilous journey might be their best hope of survival, yet he contrasts this with the way the zoo markets the elephants and may not really have their best interests at heart. In addition, French's account of the death of a young Lowry Park zookeeper at the hands of a captive elephant gives the reader pause about whether keeping wild animals in a zoo is really the best decision for all involved. The story that French is trying to tell is complex, and I think that both helps and hurts the book. On one hand, the reader gets to view the zoo from many different perspectives. We meet various keepers, the animals, and the zoo's management. We get a glimpse of how a modern zoo must balance financial health, conservation efforts, and the well-being of the animals. In the case of Lowry Park Zoo, we also get an insider's look at the controversy surrounding Lex Salisbury, who was both loved and reviled within the zoo. On the other hand, juggling so many different stories means that none of them get enough attention. I often found myself getting caught up in a particular story line and then being disappointed when I didn't get more depth or follow-up. French has a wealth of material, and I wished he had written a longer book. Too often, I felt like the individual stories were given short shrift. Despite that, I found the book to be interesting and eye-opening. Although it did little to help me settle my own misgivings about zoos in general, the book provided me with lots of food for thought. If you're interested in learning more about zoos, I think this book does a good job highlighting their pros and cons. (And it would be a great Z book if you are doing the A to Z Title Challenge.) A word of caution though: If you are reading this book mostly because you are interested in animals, you might be disappointed. Although French takes the time to discuss various animals, he spends considerably more time on the various political machinations that affected the zoo during Salisbury's stewardship.

One of my favorite books ever, as someone who volunteers with an exotic animal rescue and sees a lot of this from all sides every weekend. This book shows the real behind the scene look at what goes on in a Zoo, from the everyday joy and incredible heartbreak of working around these amazing animals to the dealing with the public and press. The author looks at Zoo life from all sides, the owner of the Zoo, the caretakers who live their lives taking care of the animals in their charge, the

efforts of PETA, the people on the front lines having to make tough choices for the greater good, and finally from what the animals themselves must feel. I recommend it to anyone considering a job in exotic animal care or Zoology. You will learn about the long hours spent taking care of a sick animal, the bond you share with them, and yes the soul crushing heartbreak when you loose them.

This book goes far beyond just telling about animals. With obvious great study there are many insights into why animals act the way they do. Certainly animals, like humans, have personalities, but through close observation you can start to see definite traits that the animals have. The book brings them out for selected animals at the zoo and in the process points out what I can watch for the next time I go to the zoo. Instead of the cursory watching that I have done in the past I can now see where actually studying them would be even more entertaining and instructional. I am looking forward to future visits to the (in this case Toledo) zoo. I am also discovering how important zoos are to the future of many animals who are losing where they live naturally as the world's population grows and our need for living spaces expands into their natural habitats. Zoos are more than just a chance to see various animals from around the world.

If you like animals, you will enjoy this well written, interesting and informative book. It will make your subsequent visits to zoos more interesting.

Living in Tampa and having spent time at Lowrey Park gave me a great connection to the book. I've dropped off a small, injured owl to the zoo' veterinary services and remember when the Lex Salisbury "scandal" broke on the news, so this was an interesting perspective on familiar territory. Learning the back stories was fascinating and provoked a great discussion about zoos and endangered animals.

Neither too "pro" nor too "anti" zoos, this book relates the development of one zoo, the Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa, FL from a poor imitation of a zoo to a high-quality animal park. There were some controversial steps taken as the zoo experienced growth. The care of the animals increased measurably. Successful breeding also increased, which is one of the more controversial topics in the tale. Having visited the Lowry Park Zoo many times, and having a granddaughter who is an intern at the zoo as I write this, I found the book to be immensely interesting. However, if you have never been to Tampa you will still enjoy reading about the zoo's story. Imagine what an undertaking when elephants were flown from Africa to Florida to populate the pachyderm exhibit!

This is a book that is thoughtfully written. It provides excellent insights into the issues and problems that public and private zoos face and presents what this reader considers to be a balanced perspective. It also provides a compassionate view of how animals taken from the wild face totally new - and sometimes frightening - experiences. I recommend it highly for anyone interested in animals. It is an excellent read even if you are not an animal lover.

A huge eye opener of what goes on in the daily operations of a zoo, and how the people that run it are at times less concerned for the animals welfare and more concerned for the bottom line -profit! Beautiful tales of specific animals, their personalities, and apparent love for their caregivers. I will never look at a zoo and its inhabitants in the same way after reading this book.

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