*A word from the zoo’s caretakers (Lynn & Danny 30.04.2020)*

We have looked after Exmoor Zoo since 1993. It has become part of the social fabric of North Devon and some of our employees are well known to mum’s and dads who were visited by the zoo in their school or came and walked around as a school group over 15 to 20 years ago – most of us are all still here!

With over 170 different species and 65 enclosures within the rural landscape of the rugged and beautiful Devon countryside the zoo is very much a hidden gem and has had many returning visitors who enjoy the North Devon scene.

This is all likely to change this year. Many people have kindly given donations to the zoo, bought season tickets in advance and day tickets from the zoo’s website. Without this help we would not be still here – all of us hoping for the best and trying to make every penny donated go as far as possible. A keeping team of what was 15 keepers is now down to hard working core of less than a handful and redundancies have begun………..

The zoo may just be able to survive with the government help of the job retention scheme through the strictest social lockdown period – great! However, the recent announcement by Michael Gove (Secretary for the state) that no visitors are expected to try and visit the South-west this year (28.04.20) will mean without generous funding your zoo will not survive until next year.

Like any seasonal tourist dependent zoo we rely on the summer tourist trade to provide the money to go through the following winter….. No tourism, no trade ….., no money…. No zoo!

We have managed to reduce our running costs down by over a third but this is predominantly at the expense of our keepers who have virtually all be furloughed as we have no admission income. The remaining few of us are getting progressively worn out and there does not seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. We would dearly like to be able to bring back keepers from furlough but we do not have the resources to do this – so we will struggle and stay positive looking for a way to survive.

If you can afford a donation please consider the zoo, if you would have normally visited by now – how about buying a ticket on-line? We will still be here for the summer and we will be open! We were never officially told to close but the social lock down meant this was unavoidable. We will be here for those who live in the area - as we always have been **even** during the winter when everybody else has closed. Come and support us – we need your visit and the animals will certainly appreciate you!

Please support us and when we open our doors again with the social distancing policy please accept there are not many of us left here now – just enough to keep you safe, look after the animals and welcome you with a smile albeit from over 2 metres away or from behind glass or a Perspex barrier!

The zoo with 90% of staff furloughed now is costing about £27,500 a month to care and look after the animals. The cost will be significantly higher when we open as we will have to bring keepers and admission staff back from furlough and somehow, we need to find some help to get us through this forthcoming winter.

Come and visit as soon as you can and maybe get a ticket in advance by booking online through our website. We will let you know when we open our doors again.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this letter. Stay safe…………..