

"A good number of the animals I saw were 'zoo-tic', which means they were pacing in their cages, biting the metal bars, and breathing heavily. One of the elephants had what appeared to be an open wound on its head, and the orangutan was not given any water." McGivern repeatedly tried to contact zoo officials to notify them of her findings, but without much success.

The condition of the enclosures was, in most cases, extremely bad, and the level of cleanliness and hygiene was poor. Particularly shocking to McGivern, though, was that the zoo keepers themselves were ignoring people's abuse of the animals, and some rules about animal treatment, normal in other countries, appeared nonexistent at Tensoji.

"One zoo keeper was actually smoking in front of the animals," she said incredulously.

Solving Tensoji's problems, though, will not be easy. For those who would simply scream "Close down the zoo!" McGivern's response is "And then what? What happens to the extra animals? You have no choice but to offer them to other, perhaps less respectable zoos or destroy them."

Furthermore, despite the horrors, McGivern was quick to point out that at least Tensoji is an officially registered zoo. "It's not like officials are totally unaware of the problems. Renovations are taking place, and Tensoji is actually viewed as one of the better zoos in Japan today."

One indication that zoo officials are trying to bring Tensoji Zoo into the 20th century is that newer facilities for the polar bears and lions are quite large, with ample room for the animals to move around.

"The problem has as much to do with public education about respect for nature and the environment as with proper facilities," she pointed out. "Once education improves, things will hopefully change." Based on the behavior of certain higher mammals at Tensoji, though, such change may still be a long way off.