

## Live Feeding

**Position:** The Edmonton Humane Society does not support feeding live animals to animals in captivity.

### Summary

- Live feeding is the practice of feeding an animal to another animal in captivity.
- Animals in captivity refers to animals that will not be released into the wild and do not need to practice live feeding.
- Live feeding is unnecessarily cruel to the prey animal and can present a safety risk to animals in captivity.
- Live feeding should only be considered under exceptional circumstances as advised by a veterinarian where there is a welfare concern for a predator that is a pet in captivity. Should there be a need for live feeding, all efforts to minimize the suffering of the prey animal must be taken and guardians should transition the predator from live feeding to eating pre-killed prey.

### Rationale

- Evidence suggests a variety of animals are sentient, or capable of having subjective experiences and experiencing pain and pleasure. When an animal's sentience is not yet determined, EHS believes a precautionary principle should be applied and sentience should be assumed in order to protect an animal's welfare.
- Since evidence suggests a variety of animals are capable of feeling pain and suffering, live feeding is unnecessarily cruel to the prey animal. Live feeding in an inescapable environment is psychologically and physically distressing to the prey animal.
- There is risk of harm to a captive predator should a prey animal defend themselves. Injuries to the captive predator, such as punctures and scratches from an animal's teeth and claws, may require veterinary care.
- Animals in captivity who will not be released into the wild, do not need to practice predation for survival.
- Animals in captivity may not have experience in predation, leading to prolonged distress for the prey animal and potential harm to an inexperienced predator.
- Live prey does not offer a higher degree of nutritional value to animals than pre-killed frozen prey.
- Instant death does not always occur in live feeding. A prolonged death is inhumane to prey animals and can compromise the well-being of the predator if the prey is still capable of defending itself.
- Enrichment that does not compromise the welfare of any animal can be delivered to animals in captivity by offering them food in novel ways, providing changes in environment, exercise and providing other outlets for natural behaviours.

- Live prey can carry parasites and diseases, which can put the prey animal, predator animal and human(s) at risk.
- Pet guardians may believe their pet will only eat live prey due to inappetence. In the case of abnormal appetite or anorexia, veterinary advice should first be sought to determine if a possible medical explanation exists, and to determine if live feeding is necessary and justified.
- Alternatives to live feeding should be sought. Pet guardians can encourage the consumption of food and provide enrichment by:
  - Heating food;
  - Altering the food's presentation;
  - Altering the food's scent;
  - Changing feeding times; or
  - Hiding food or changing its location.
- Exceptional circumstances as diagnosed by a veterinarian may warrant live feeding after other interventions fail. If live feeding is prescribed by a veterinarian, then efforts to protect the welfare of the predator and prey must be taken.
  - Prey animals should be humanely sourced and treated with their welfare in mind.
  - Prey should be removed from the environment if not killed after a designated period of time to minimize distress to the prey animal and risk of injury to the predator.
  - Prey should not endure prolonged suffering and should be humanely euthanized, if necessary, to reduce suffering.
- Training an animal to accept humanely pre-killed prey should be practiced if live feeding occurs, in order to transition the animal to only feeding on pre-killed prey to reduce the number of live animals required for feeding.

## References

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