

Big Animals On The Loose... In Smalltown America

The Bizarre and Frightening Incident that Took Place in Zanesville, Ohio, on October 18, 2011

Zanesville, Ohio – and then the world – was caught by surprise when a deranged man released dozens of exotic wild animals from his farm. Suddenly, there were lions, tigers, cougars, wolves and monkeys running freely in Ohio. Thousands of people were forced to lock themselves in their homes. No law enforcement agency in the world had ever had to deal with such a disaster before.



| **Shimon Rosenberg** |

It was shortly after 5 o'clock on the afternoon of October 18, 2011. A retired schoolteacher named Sam Kopchak went into his backyard to check on the horse he had bought nine days before.

Red, Kopchak's new Arabian stallion, was uneasy. He hid in a corner of his corral and reared himself up on his hind legs again and again. Kopchak's backyard was separated from his neighbor's, Terry Thompson, by a wall. When Kopchak looked over the wall, he noticed that Thompson's horses were behaving even more nervously than his own. They ran in frenzied circles around the middle of the yard.

Then, in their center, he was able to discern some kind of dark shape. Kopchak stepped forward to take a closer look. He was shocked at what he saw.

It was a large bear.

A bear in Zanesville, Ohio, was not an everyday sight. But there it was. A levelheaded man, Kopchak did not panic – especially since the bear was running away from him. The first thing he would do, he thought to himself, was move his horse into its stall for safety and then he would contact the appropriate authorities.

However, before Kopchak could move more than a few feet, his horse stopped dead in its tracks. There, on the other side of the fence, a full grown African lion was staring straight at them!

Paralyzed by fright and staring death in the face—and a bloody, gruesome death at that—Kopchak tried to take hold of his emotions. He knew enough about wild animals to know that it was dangerous to look them in the face. He also knew that it was just as dangerous to flee. Forcing himself to remain calm, he continued walking with firm, measured steps with his horse in the direction of the barn.

The moment he entered the barn, Kopchak locked the door. Then he called his 84-year old mother, who lived in his home about 100 yards away, and explained to her that there was “a major problem.”

Kopchak knew that his neighbor,

Terry Thompson, raised various animals on his 76-acre property. He had heard bears growling there many times. But he was not aware of the exact nature and number of animals kept there. This much was clear: the two animals he had just seen must have come from Thompson's property. Kopchak asked his mother to call Thompson to let him know that his animals had escaped.

The elderly woman called but no one picked up. She listened with growing anxiety as the phone kept ringing. When it was clear that no one was going to pick up, she dialed 911.

Now, 911 operators are trained to be prepared for any emergency, but the operator who fielded this call was caught off guard. Never before had he gotten a call like this. An elderly woman was calmly explaining that her son had just seen a bear and a lion, as though there was nothing out of the ordinary sighting such creatures on the loose.

The truth was that the senior Mrs. Kopchak was frightened out of her wits. So much so that when the operator asked her for her name, she hesitated for a second. She had completely forgotten.

Meanwhile, Sam Kopchak remained trapped with his horse in the barn. Looking out of a small window, he realized that a veritable plague of wild beasts had descended on his town. A wolf dashed by and then a second bear—much larger than the first—lumbered past. The lion that had sat outside his yard was now pacing back and forth. Soon he saw it joined by an equally fierce-looking lioness.

There were few animals left in the jungle that could still have frightened Kopchak more. But then he saw a tiger. Tigers are actually larger than lions if they're fully grown. The tiger growled savagely as it set off in the direction of the horses....

The Great Zanesville Zoo Escape

Deputy Sheriff Jonathan Merry was in the middle of handing over a court summons to a couple in Zanesville. Just then the 911 call came in that there was a bear and a lion

on the loose. Merry rushed to the given address. When he arrived at Thompson's home, he looked into the field. He saw a tiger, a large black bear and two lions. All were walking around freely with no fence to keep them in.

The sheriff climbed the stairs to Kopchak's house. While he stood there waiting for Mrs. Kopchak to open the door, he observed a grey wolf running in the street. He drew his handgun and dashed back to his patrol car. Then he drove after the wolf, which was running toward a nearby home. The wolf stopped and slid into the front yard.

Merry got out of his car and opened the trunk. From there he removed a large caliber rifle, specially designed for shooting animals. Then he began following the creature on foot. As he mulled in his mind his next step, he heard his radio crackle with a clear order: “Put the animal down.” All animals were to be killed; no risking human life by firing tranquilizers at them!

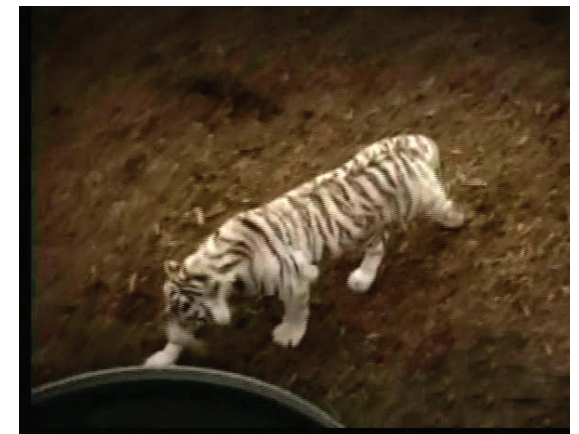
Now the deputy sheriff didn't think twice. He pulled the trigger and the wolf keeled over dead. Then he fired a few more times, just to be sure. Merry walked up to the carcass to inspect it. Yes, it was a wolf. As he wondered where it came from, his thoughts were interrupted by fresh activity over the radio. Several officers had cornered a lion near Thompson's house and they needed assistance, immediately.

Merry dashed back to his car. He knew that his colleagues were armed with only standard small-caliber pistols. They worked fine against criminals, but were not effective against large animals. Merry was the only one properly equipped to deal with a lion or the like.

He raced back in the direction of Thompson's ranch. As he neared he saw another deputy fleeing in panic. Confused, Merry stopped his car and stepped out, grabbing for the rifle on the passenger seat with his right hand. However, the gun got caught on the car's police computer. Before he could sit back down and free the rifle, he saw a black bear running straight toward him.



The path to Thompson's home is blocked except for emergency vehicles.



An escaped white tiger.



Photo taken by a resident of a bear roaming freely.

All Merry was armed with now was his standard pistol. Was it enough to stop a 350 pound charging black bear? He didn't have a choice. Merry lifted his handgun and began firing. The bear