

Zoo Says Bear Wasn't Shot, Maybe

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The Moscow Zoo on Monday distanced itself from an earlier statement that a sniper had shot at one of its polar bears.

"At this stage we can neither confirm nor deny that the animal was hit by bullets," zoo spokeswoman Yelena Mendosa told The Moscow Times.

The zoo said in a [statement](#) on its web site late last week that a 20-year-old polar bear named Wrangel had some 11 wounds that must have been inflicted by bullets from a small-caliber gun.

The statement, along with photos of the bleeding wounds, was still on the zoo's site Monday.

But Mendosa said no bullets had been found and the wounds might stem from a skin infection. She added that the bleeding had stopped and the bear was doing fine.

"He eats, drinks and is behaving like normal," she said.

She explained that the sniper theory had been the result of a preliminary analysis by the zoo's

guards. "Our experts are continuing to look into this case, she said.

But Mendosa warned that it would be difficult to make definite conclusions because this required analyzing the bear's skin — a task that is impossible without anesthetic.

The bear is considered too old to be tranquilized. "We would not risk that," she said.

Mendosa also confirmed that the wounds were discovered in late October, even though the statement about the gunshots was published Thursday.

She said Wrangel had been kept in a special cage out of visitors' sight because the zoo considered it dangerous to keep a full-grown male in the main cage with several cubs.

The isolated cage, however, was visible from an apartment block opposite the zoo, leading to the theory that shots had been fired from the building.

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