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# Dozens Stuck in Midair at the Bronx Zoo

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Rob Bennett for The New York Times

Visitors to the Bronx Zoo were stuck after the Skyfari, which glides over zoo attractions, stopped working on Wednesday.

By TRYMAINE LEE and AL BAKER  
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About three dozen cable car passengers on a sightseeing ride were stranded for nearly five hours on Wednesday night at the Bronx Zoo after an emergency mechanism caused the ride to shut down, leaving riders dangling over the African Plains exhibit and other parts of the zoo.

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Officials said the ride, known as the Skyfari, which gives riders a bird's-eye view of the zoo, automatically shut itself down about 5:30 p.m. when a wheel on one of the ride's 14 gondolas slipped off the overhead cable on which the ride operates. There were no reported injuries, according to the police.

But still, it was not a pleasant experience.

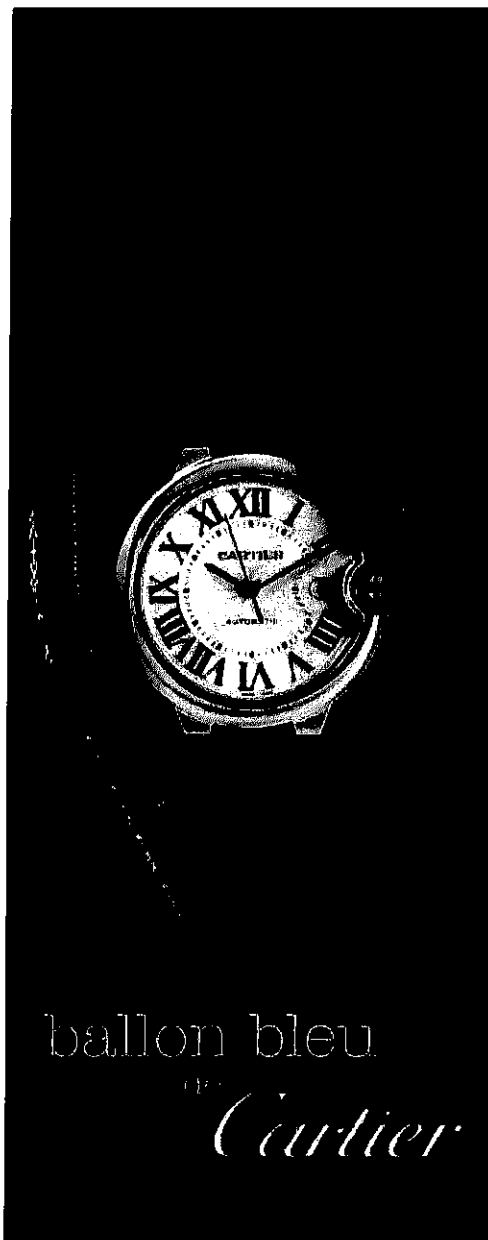
"It was a closed box for five hours," said Robin Dean, 25, who was on the Skyfari with a friend and the friend's baby. "Basically, I was hungry and a little cold."

The three people inside the disabled car, which hung about 100 feet from the ground, were rescued first, about three hours after the shutdown, officials said. Police and fire officials said that 37 people were trapped, including seven children, at heights ranging from 60 to 100 feet.

Workers rescued the three trapped in the disabled gondola, using a crane with a basket attached. Once they were unloaded, workers began making repairs to the car.

At a news conference after the rescue, Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly said the State Department of Labor would be conducting a thorough investigation. He added that the ride would probably not be running in the coming days.

Olga Perez, one of the three people rescued from the disabled gondola, said she had come to the park with her 9-year-old son, her 14-year-old daughter and relatives visiting from Colombia. She said that her son, who was in another gondola, had a cellphone, and they spoke during the ordeal. "He said, 'Mommy, I am a little afraid,'" she recalled. "Me too," I said. "I understand. Just try to be patient. Everything is going to be O.K."



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By 10:20 p.m., police rescuers and engineers had fixed the wheel mechanism on the disabled gondola, which restored power and normal functioning to the ride, moving the cars to the terminus and allowing the passengers to exit normally. Officials said the passengers would undergo a medical evaluation. One, seven months pregnant, was taken to a nearby hospital complaining of cramps.

Officials said the crane was brought in by Bay Crane of Long Island City, Queens.

About 9:30 p.m., a man walking a dog around the perimeter of the zoo said he could hear an announcement blaring from speakers inside the park urging the stranded riders to "relax and stay calm," to "stay seated," and promising that they would be moving shortly.

For five hours, Ms. Dean said, her view of the park — with the Dancing Crane Cafe below — did not change.

"It was kind of boring to be up there," Ms. Dean said. The baby slept most of the time.

A few ambulances also entered the park, as well as the Fire Department's mobile respiratory treatment unit, a bus loaded with oxygen for the distressed. Police officials said the oxygen was brought to the scene as a precaution.

Shortly before 11 p.m., a caravan of dark blue sedans from the Miles cab company pulled into a service entrance of the park. Through a chain-link fence, mothers and children, families dressed in T-shirts and shorts, some with stuffed animals and prizes in their arms, could be seen getting into the cars. As the cars zipped out of the park and past East 185th Street and Southern Boulevard, a crowd gathered on the corner cheered, applauding the riders' safe rescue. Then waves of zoo workers who had stuck it out during the episode began to file out.

One worker said of the rescued riders, "Everyone is doing fine, everyone got off great." The woman, who did not give her name, said that some of the riders were having dinner in one of the zoo's restaurants, courtesy of the zoo. Others, she said, "just wanted to go home."

The episode brought to mind the 2006 breakdown of the Roosevelt Island Tramway, which stalled in midair, trapping dozens of passengers over the East River, some for as long as 11 hours.

John F. Calvelli, a spokesman for the zoo, apologized to those inconvenienced by the shutdown.

Firefighters at the scene said they could not recall a time in the last 15 years when they were called to the zoo to respond to an emergency on the Skyfari. They added that they do not regularly train to make high-angle rescues on the ride, though the police said that they do practice such maneuvers on the Skyfari. Firefighters do, however, train to do rescues on another tramlike cable car ride in the zoo that crosses the Bronx River because it hovers over water.

The entrance to the zoo at East 185th Street and Southern Boulevard was the center of rescue operations. Residents in nearby buildings peered from their windows, watching the spectacle.

The Skyfari has a 56-person capacity, with each of its gondolas able to hold four passengers. It takes passengers on a ride over the Butterfly Garden and parts of the African Plains exhibit.

According to the Bronx Zoo's Web site, the Skyfari travels between the Zoo Center and Asia Plaza, where passengers peer down at baboons, the lush tree line and the bustle of

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