
Lecture 5

The Ethics of Zoos

Key Learning Objectives

- Debate the ethical considerations of Zoos
- Explain the objectives of zoos and how are they achieved
- Identify the concerns and the positive outcomes of Zoos

Zoo Definition

- 'A place where animals live in a protected state and are made accessible to human observations' - Biologist Colin Tudge
- This includes zoos, sanctuaries, aquariums
- Animals are contained in such a way that they are **dependent** on people to provide for their needs

Dr. Hutchins - Director and William Conway Chair of the Department of Conservation and Science for the American Zoo and Aquarium Association

- The Central Question we need to answer as caring people is: do the benefits of accredited zoos to society outweigh cost to individual animal welfare?
 - The primary benefits zoos provide to society are **education** and **conservation** of species and habitats
 - The central ethical justification for zoos and aquariums in the modern world is their commitment to **conservation**
 - During the past decade, zoos have shifted their focus from preserving species through **captive breeding programs** to **preserve habitats and species in the wild**.
 - Conservation alone is not enough to justify the existence of zoos, a strong **commitment to individual animal welfare** is equally important

Remember: Michael Robinson - Director of the Smithsonian's National Zoo, Washington

- 'Zoos are fundamentally places of **spectacle and entertainment**. Research, education and conservation are functions which, in the last 100 years or so, have been grafted onto **the recreational rootstock** of Zoos.

Why do people visit zoos?

- Research has indicated that visitors generally attend zoos in groups to socialise, relax, learn about animals, see exotic animals, entertain and educate children, photograph nature and enjoy the outdoors.

Ridgeway et al., 2005

- A study using visitor surveys and observations in six zoo exhibits with underwater viewing found that most people reported that they visited zoos for social or recreational purposes (86%)
- A small number of visitors reported attending zoos facilities to learn about animals (6%)

Marino et al., 2010

- To date there is **no compelling** or even **particularly suggestive** evidence for the **claim** that **zoos and aquariums promote attitude change, education, and interest in conservation** in visitors
- There may well be some truth to this assertion, well controlled research is lacking.

Zoo-Accreditation organisations such as the AZA and EAZA have the strategic vision underpinning the education goals for Zoo visitors;

- 'A heightened appreciation of the biodiversity and a connectedness with the natural world'
 - These are really the goals of Zoos
 - These are top-down educational goals. What do we know about the unpredictability of 'free-choice learning in environments such as Zoos and Aquariums? Unsure.
 - Zoo **visitors are receptive** to conservation messaging and initiatives at Zoos and are more likely to participate in on-site conservation opportunities
 - While current research suggests that **repeat visitors** are more likely to engage in conservation efforts
 - Little is known about causal factors related to such findings, and almost no research exists to-date comparing the conservation efforts of visitors vs. non-visitors
- Is it just that people who are already interested in conservation efforts tend to be the people who go to Zoo's the most?

Zoos as Institutions

- Zoos are one of the world's most popular cultural institutions
 - Really a tourist attraction for cities
- Zoos represent a profitable business and a global industry
 - Zoos need to work within a budget - they're often government owned, and it's really expensive to keep animals
- It is not natural to contain thousands of animals within artificial enclosures built in the heart of our largest cities

Natural Habitat?

- For animal welfare, natural habitat is a hugely important thing
- Yet, climate represents one of the biggest challenges to Animal Welfare that Zoos face
- Zoos like to keep lots of different types of animals - even those that do not suit their climate
 - E.g., African animals in climates with snow in winter

Ethical Questions

- Can Today's Zoos be ethically justified?
- Are Zoos effective in their conservation efforts? Do people pay attention to conservation efforts?
- Are Zoos able to meet the needs of the animals it contains and provide for positive welfare?
- If people are the main beneficiaries of zoos, how can this benefit be maximised? Ok so we justify zoos because they contribute to conservation efforts, how do we make sure that these are being received? How do we make sure that the benefits of Zoos for animals are maximised?

Environmental Ethicists

- Focus on moral concern and societal action on the **protection of endangered species** and the **preservation of wilderness** - rather than reducing the pain and suffering (or promoting the rights or dignity) of wild animals
- If Zoos are effective in their conservation efforts - they believe that to some degree pain and suffering of captive animals is justified
- To some extent, this is what happens at Zoos - conservation > Zoo animal welfare