

WHY WE HAVE ZOOS?

In the Past

Whatever anyone may say, the REAL reason we have zoos is because people like to look at animals. That is how it all started. Rich, powerful people collected animals because they liked to look at them and show them to friends, family and colleagues. Soon, other people saw that they could make money by collecting animals for sale and also by showing animals to other people for a fee.

So a great many animals were captured, and many others killed in the process. When it was no longer cheap and easy to obtain animals from the wild, THEN people started keeping rare species for conservation.

Present

Today many zoos exist in order to promote conservation of wildlife. Other zoos exist for commercial or political reasons. Zoos which are trying to conserve wildlife are likely to have better standards than zoos run for entertainment and financial gain, although not always.

Reproduction - breeding wild animals for

- . preserving biodiversity
- . display in other zoos so they don't take from the wild
- . animal health and well-being

Research - scientific study on wildlife

- . behaviour and biology
- . things that can't be studied in wild
- . needs in captivity and wild
- . for better conservation.

Education - teaching in a living natural history museum

- . responsibility for our piece of the world
- . respect for all life forms
- . interest in wildlife conservation
- . treating all animals with kindness

Future

In the future, we want all zoos to be committed to wildlife conservation... in word and in action. We want all zoos to be conservation-conscious. That is the opposite of conservation-careless. Conservation-conscious zoos can conduct effective conservation activities.

By Sally Walker. © Photos: Joel Sartore

Zoo Outreach Organisation (Z.O.O.) likes zoos that are "conservation-conscious". These are zoos that provides good living conditions for their animals and promote wildlife conservation. These zoos also carry out activities which aid wildlife conservation.



Z.O.O. calls the other kinds of zoos "conservation-careless" zoos. Often a "conservation-careless" zoo is also careless about animal welfare and ethics.

CONSERVATION-CONSCIOUS ZOOS & CONSERVATION-CARELESS ZOOS

Conservation-conscious zoos have most of these things ...

- a permanent site and supportive environment for animals
- management for the greater good of the community
- adequate finance
- record keeping
- priority of kind treatment of animals
- meet legal requirements
- trained and interested staff
- clean & safe enclosures, pens, yards, spacious, naturalistic enclosures
- a small number of mated species
- fresh, nutritious foods & clean water
- healthy animals and healthy staff
- veterinarians according to number of animals
- good educational signage; an education & a conservation programme
- a breeding strategy for all animals
- a Mission Statement
- a Master Plan for development
- conservation as its highest value

Conservation-careless zoos have some or all of these ...

- unsanitary, always smelly enclosures
- unhealthy animals
- nervous, frightened-looking animals
- apathetic, non-skilled staff
- uncertain economic future
- insufficient finance to run properly
- bad or no educational signage
- no education programmes
- overcrowded exhibits
- small cage style enclosures
- no enrichment in cages or enclosures
- high death rate & low birth rate
- inadequate organisation
- spoiled food left in enclosures
- water needs changing
- faeces and urine not collected
- corruption
- frequent transfer of officials
- inadequate powers for staff
- no control over public behaviour (teasing, feeding vandalism)
- no breeding controls- surplus animals
- organisation run for individual profit

Conservation-careless zoos do not achieve sustainable management. Such zoos can cause species extinctions, through

- high death rate due to bad care, bad living-conditions and lack of husbandry & veterinary care
- poor sanitation, nutrition, preventative medicine, etc.
- indiscriminate capture of wildlife
- use of unethical animal suppliers
- wrong release of surplus wildlife
- inability to convey right values because of quality of facility visitor misbehaviour like feeding, harassing, vandalism



IMPROVEMENT, NOT CLOSURE OF ZOOS

Animal welfare activists and also enthusiasts often say that all the zoos should be closed and their animals released into the wild. That's NOT a good idea. Why?

Even if everyone agreed that all zoos should "free" their animals, it is unthinkable to release them to the wild. It is not only not-kind to animals being released, it is also not-kind to animals living wild in forests. Why is that so?

No survival skills -- Animals which have spent their lives in captivity don't know how to survive in the wild. They would die miserable deaths, not having the experience of living in forests.

Insufficient space or territory -- Even animals which have lived in captivity a relatively short time and which learned and remember how to survive in the wild, may not thrive due to a subtle signal that may attract wrong attention from other wild animals, or because all territories are already occupied and the released animal cannot find a place to settle down.

Disease -- Animals in captivity may have been infected with diseases, parasites or conditions called "zoonoses" from other captive animals or zoo staff and take these to the wild when they are released.

Do you know how many zoos there are in the world? No? Well, nobody knows exactly how many facilities that call themselves "zoos" or a similar name there are. About 1000 zoos come under zoo associations whose goal is to improve them if they are conservation-careless. But there are many thousands more which have no such goal.

Imagine if all these animals in all these facilities were released to the wild!. The

"wild" is already too small to support existing wildlife. These animals would over-run existing habitats and force out the natural wildlife, or carry disease that could kill many wild animals. This is a kind of "wild and free" nobody wants. It is conservation and animal welfare careless!.



When a "conservation-careless" zoo is closed, it is not good news; it is a tragedy because the animals have no place to go. "Conservation-conscious" zoos should not take them and they should not go the wild. Many animal facilities should be closed but what would be done with the animals?

We are on a crusade to improve "conservation-careless" zoos, rather than close them ... unless they are absolutely beyond salvage. We may never be able to improve ALL zoos but we can try to make a difference and educating the public about zoos. What can YOU do to help make a conservation-careless zoo into a conservation-conscious one? Read on !

These reasons are only the tip of the iceberg.

REASONS NOT TO CLOSE A ZOO

When authorities close a zoo, they often think of releasing the captive animals to their natural habitat, and some do. Consider these statistics and decide if animals are better off after this ...

- 75% of captive-released mammals die within a year.
- Mammals are territorial: when re-located they try to go home which puts them in conflict with humans or predators for which they are prey.
- Captive-release tampers with the natural balance of forest eco-system.
- If the forest is ideal, it already has other residents of the same species.
- Urban animals will NOT survive in forest areas. Survival skills are taught by wild life not zoo life.
- Animals accustomed to zoo food will NOT spontaneously know the varieties of edible forest fruits.
- Mammals have a strong habitat preference. Monkeys accustomed to living with people will find other people and become dangerous pests.
- Zoo animals released into forests in South Asia normally are not monitored and may all be dead.
- Release after captivity is tantamount to pitting one animal or troop against another.
- Release after captivity is likely to result in a slow, cruel, agonizing death.
- Release after captivity is the same as dumping out of sight
- Release after captivity most often results in the very opposite of conservation

CRITERIA FOR RELEASING CAPTIVE ANIMALS

- Captive-release should be used only as a conservation tool for threatened species.
- Captive-release is the last choice in conservation tools for a species because it is so hard.
- A Special re-training and acclimatization is crucial for any chance of survival for captive-released animals.
- Animals slated for release should not be hand-fed or hand-reared.
- Animals to be captive-released must be screened for disease.
- Releasing subspecies into a locality can result in genetic pollution.
- Release site has to be meet very stringent requirements – habitat quality, prey/food density, access to water, adequate size.
- All animals have to be monitored after release.
- The cost of rehoming animals is staggering. It is cheaper to improve zoos.

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HOW TO HELP?

When people get it into their heads to help the animals at a zoo, the first thing they do is go for the Director and staff. This is usually wrong.

First of all most people do not know what is really bad in zoos. They think they do, but they don't. They worry that animals which are perfectly fit, are too thin, because they are not as fat as their family dog. Or that the lions are in pain because they are roaring, when it is their nature to do so. Etc. People have funny ideas about animals and particularly animals in captivity.

Most South Asian zoos are controlled by city or state governments and in most cases, governments own the zoo, get the gate money and give the zoo a grant to run. The Director often lacks sufficient financial powers to make improvements in the zoo even if money is there. It is easier for the zoo to get huge sums to construct a new enclosure, than minute amounts to keep the old enclosures in repair.

The Director often belongs to another service and has no experience of zoo or animal management. In South Asia the people closest to the animals -- the zookeepers -- are ill paid and uneducated.

The point is that if you are interested in improving your zoo, you need to start somewhere to the north of the director and staff ...somewhere higher up. You need to examine the laws of your country and state to see if there is any zoo and animal welfare legislation. You need to find out if the director and staff have avenues of training, sufficient finance, sufficient powers, etc. If not, then what can they do? What can you do to help them?



Zoo management is one of the most difficult and delicate jobs in the world. Managing a zoo (that is, a conservation-conscious zoo) is like conducting very high level medical research in a laboratory with visitors peering over your shoulder, munching popcorn, perhaps shouting at their schoolmates, etc. Or it is like trying to send a rocket to the moon with a constant stream of visitors who feel constrained to comment on every aspect of your work, and a press which gives more respect to the onlookers than to the scientists, etc. How do you save lives in such a medical lab? How do you make the rocket safe for the astronauts. How does a zoo save species in those conditions?

That is why we at Zoo Outreach Organisation are fond of saying Zoo Management IS rocket science. Because it is as or more difficult, subtle and stressful. Medical labs and rocket scientists have lavish budgets. Nothing is spared. Zoos, particularly in tropical countries, have to manage on a fraction of what they require. In India, the Zoo Act and Central Zoo Authority are very strong zoo legislation. Still some problems persist but there has been great improvement.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

**Be positive and constructive, not petty and critical.
Be Conservation-Conscious, not Conservation-Careless.**

As a regular zoo visitor :

- You can help a zoo by obeying its rules & by being CONSERVATION-CONSCIOUS yourself.
- keep the zoo clean; put trash in bins
- keep the zoo safe; don't sneak in food, plastic bags, etc. to give to animals or throw in enclosures
- keep animals safe: don't tease or feed animals or run in front of cages or make loud noises. Watch them respectfully
- keep zoo property nice - don't mark on signs or buildings or damage anything
- report faulty taps which are wasting water; turn off water in zoo toilets when you use them
- never offer zookeepers money to give you special privileges or animal products
- treat the zoo as if you had to live there. As a public zoo, it is yours too.

As an individual volunteer ...

Sometimes an individual who is particularly interested and has time to devote to the zoo can go to the Director and ask for a chance to volunteer. Some things a new volunteer could do are:

Help control visitor misbehaviour

In South Asia, zoos get a lot of visitors. Zoo staff spends a lot of time trying to protect the animals and zoo property from the visitors who tease and feed the animals and ruin zoo property. If you see someone doing these things you can tell them to stop.

Help educate the public

Only a few Asian zoos have deemed Education Officers to look after zoo education for the public. You can help with this important component of zoo conservation. There are

never enough educators for conveying the important messages of wildlife conservation. You need to contact the zoo administration and ask them if they want help. They may not. Don't force them. Try and build a relationship by providing services that help them.

Help the zoo's image

Unless your zoo is extremely conservation-careless, there will be many things to highlight about its contribution to the community, either potential or actual. Tell your friends these things. You can also write articles about the good things the zoo is doing. If something bad happens, try and find out the story behind it. Often mishaps that are reported as the fault of the zoo are actually not so.

As an organised group

Start a Friends of the Zoo (FOZ)

This is not a small undertaking. It is a big step, and one that can both help and hurt depending on the motives of the people who start and also the attitude of the zoo.

Friends of the Zoo could help the zoo ...

- by attracting financial help or "in kind" material for zoo projects from industrialists and other business persons.
- by lobbying the government to increase the zoo's budget in areas not deemed important by some officials
- by providing a volunteer work force to help with education, monitoring the enclosures, guiding tours, etc.
- by outreach activities into schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc.
- by being available in emergencies/natural calamities to do whatever is needed by the zoo
- by finding and bringing experts in specific topics needed by the zoo, such as a safety expert, or a hygiene expert, or a nutritionist, or an educationist, etc.
- by contacting other Friends of the Zoo groups around the world and learning what they do.

PRO'S AND CON'S OF ZOO VOLUNTEERS

Zoo volunteers can be a best friend or a worst enemy for a zoo and its animals. There are several reasons for this, none of which you as a potential zoo volunteer will like to hear ... but here goes.

1. Volunteers often think they know more about zoo management than the zoo authorities.
2. Volunteers have different motives -- some want "perks" and publicity at the zoo and others genuinely want to help (both can be dangerous in the zoo).
3. Volunteers cannot be held accountable - the only punishment for a volunteer is (maybe) expulsion from the zoo while employees can be suspended or sacked and have a permanent black mark against their service record.
4. Employees can be punished for mistakes made by volunteers
5. Volunteers normally want to get their hands on the animals which is the worst danger for animals, zoo administration and volunteers.

One reason why voluntarism has not come up very well in South Asian zoos is because South Asian institutional administration is very different from that of many other countries. Many zoos are run by governments in South Asia and that carries its own benefits and difficulties.

In the U.S., Canada, Australia and to a smaller extent Europe, most of the zoos have very active zoo volunteer programmes with numbers ranging from a few, involved in a very limited way, to hundreds and even thousands of members or volunteers doing every kind of job in the zoo.

Some zoos in western countries restrict their volunteers to the Education Department. Others have trained volunteers to assist with round-the-clock observation and other research. Other jobs volunteers do are : stuffing envelopes, typing, running errands, manning information desks, cleaning work, creating touch tables, specialised garden work, babysitting and handrearing animals,

fundraising, guide service, observational research, surveys, etc.

Being a volunteer sometimes makes it possible for the zoo administration to know you and discover your potential in the zoo and help you find a career. In an administrative system where there is upward mobility and freedom of hiring and firing, this works. In western countries zoo management is perceived as an interesting and even prestigious career choice.

In South Asia where there is such a high public visitation and such a low government investment in zoo education facilities, volunteers could contribute enormously to educational efforts and potential of the zoo. Yet, voluntarism has not developed much. Some of the reasons are those listed above, but the most important aspect of volunteers v.s. management is attitude. Both sides need to have an attitude of gratitude . . . the management for having a source of free help and the volunteers for an opportunity to do some meaningful work. Neither side should feel, that they are doing the other a big favour, however. Volunteers have free will – they are, or should be, volunteering for their own need to do public service. NGO's and governmental organisations often have communication problems. That being the case, we developed some guidelines for volunteers, or Friends of the Zoo groups, which have been used both in India and in South East Asia for over 2 decades.



PRINCIPLES FOR POSITIVE ACTION - HOW TO BE A GOOD ZOO VOLUNTEER



1. Make yourself useful. Provide solutions and not more problems for the zoo director. He knows what the zoo needs most from volunteer helpers. What you think will help might cause more problems for the staff and the animals.
2. Remember : your love for animals doesn't make you an expert in animal management. Your experience is probably pet or domestic animals; wild animals, even if captive, have to be kept very differently.
3. Concentrate on projects that you can do, starting with simple, straight-forward ones that have practical output. Build your credibility with such projects.
4. Accept that there are things about the zoo that you don't like but will not be able to change. Be satisfied with small improvements to any aspect of the zoo and take it as a challenge to work creatively within that context.
5. DO something. Don't just sit around passing negative remarks. Positive and constructive action will produce more and better results than complaints.
6. If you start a Friends of the Zoo, make it clear to volunteers / members that FOZ exists for the zoo and not the other way around. Privileges should consist of satisfaction of a job well done, (or at least well meant!).

7. Cooperate with other organizations interested in wildlife, environment, welfare, etc. but affiliate with none. Keep your own identity and principles.
8. Do not be condescending to zookeepers. They may not be well-educated but if they have worked with the animals for some years, they know a lot and can teach you practical things. Let them teach you and you may then teach them what you have learned about wild animals from books.
9. Do not try to help the keepers with their labour problems or administrative complaints. That is a time bomb with a very short fuse and your name is on it.
10. Insist on high standards of behaviour from all members and volunteers. Someone in the zoo won't want volunteers. One bad volunteer can justify his complaints and destroy months of hard work by right-acting volunteers.
11. Do not "tell tales" outside the zoo. Zoo management has its difficulties. Inexperienced persons can misinterpret things they don't understand.
12. Do not ask for projects involving live animals. If the animal dies or hurts someone while under your care, you and your FOZ will be in big trouble. BUT the zoo director will be in worse trouble ... his job, not his hobby, is at stake.

You may think these principles take all the fun out of working voluntarily at the zoo. Far from it. These principles can insure that you are permitted to stay in the zoo and do wanted works. It is a tremendous satisfaction. Go for it !