

What to call a "bad zoo" -- Educational Material from Z.O.O.

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This writer has been promoting improvement of zoos ever since observing a teacher encouraging a student in her class to poke a stick at a squirrel in his cage at a zoo. And since she heard that a tiger cub had bitten the zookeeper who had handreared him. And ...so on. It doesn't matter which country this happened in ... every zoo anywhere in the world have some problems. The irony of it is that the zoos which admit their faults are often the ones which need improvement least -- but not always. Owners and staff of zoos that REALLY need improvement merely to justify their existence, are the first to get upset when you point out something wrong in their zoo. I know !

The International Union for Directors of Zoological Gardens IUDZG, the first world zoo association, changed its name to World Association of Zoos and Aquariums WAZA and its direction for the sake of improvement of zoos in all respects. More recently, WAZA, having released the second World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy WZACS, which called on ALL zoos to make wildlife conservation their first priority and realising that most of the zoos of the world have a loooooooooong way to go before being anywhere near that, have taken up the issue of zoos. I say zoos because when the issue was first raised we called them "substandard zoos". This was considered considerably more tactful than "bad zoos." But this also was not enough. Many zoo persons who were members of WAZA were insulted by both the names and a rather cumbersome term of "zoos needing improvement" came into usage.

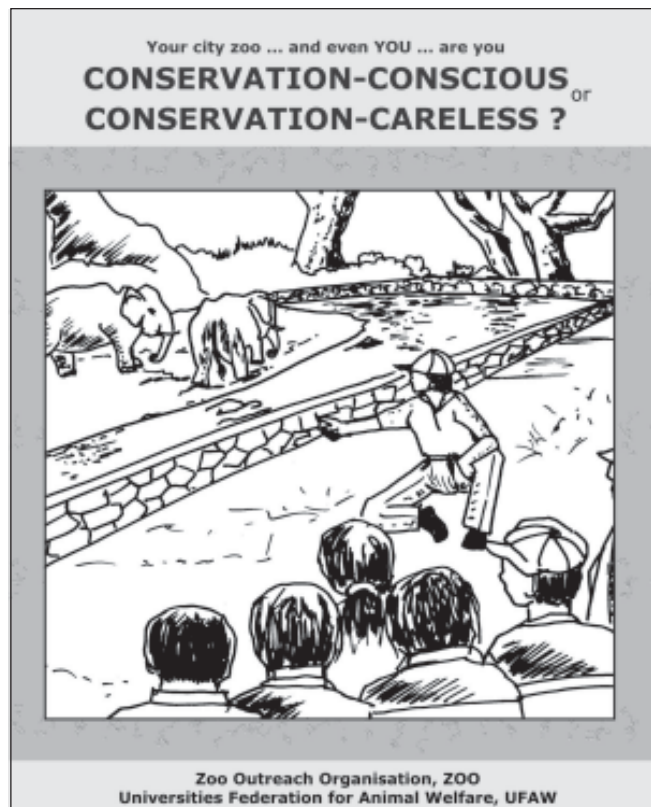
I am kind of tired of writing "zoos needing improvement" everytime I raise the subject so I have come up with another term that Zoo Outreach Organisation and I will use irregardless of the rest of the world.

Our terminology is

"conservation conscious zoos" = good
"conservation careless zoos" = not good

We are not using the term "conscious" to mean simply knowing about conservation. This implies knowing what to do to make ones' zoo the best it can be. Also we are assuming good intent and determination to improve. The term "conservation careless" is reserved for zoos (and zoo personnel, zoo visitors, zoo volunteers) which either don't know what conservation in a zoo is, don't care, or won't bother for whatever reason. Many, many, many zoos just don't know what makes a good zoo good and a bad zoo bad.

This initiative by WAZA has been about three years in process. WAZA Council and general membership approved a description of the problem and need for a direction so that conservation conscious zoos in a position to do so could help both troubled conservation conscious zoos and conservation careless zoos which can be convinced to change. Later this year there will be another WAZA working group meeting in which we will brainstorm how to implement this challenging initiative.



What can the public do ?

The public sometimes can be a zoos' worst enemy. Laymen who don't understand their contemporary conservation purpose want zoos to do all manner of wrong things, without understanding the consequences. How could they know ? Zoo management isn't exactly taught in school or night courses on cable T.V. Most of the things that zoos have to do to really be conservation-conscious and safe for animal and man are things that nobody would know on their own.

For example, the public always wants exotic animals -- animals from anywhere except their own country. This problem is peculiar to countries like India and others in the tropical countries because we have trouble obtaining, breeding and maintaining animals from other continents. The climate is different, or the various bacteria is inimical to exotic animals, or the level of care is just not enough. Whatever it is, exotic animals cost a fortune to import and then to have them die soon is a zoo manager's nightmare. In Asia every care has been taken by conservation conscious zoos and this still happens sometimes.

But there is another reason for a zoo to focus attention on its indigenous and endemic species and that is for conservation. Using India as an example, there are many wild animals in the wild in India that need a conservation breeding programme. A responsible zoo, a conservation conscious zoo, should focus on those animals rather than giraffes and zebras or chimpanzees. Yet the public won't keep quiet about this and even government officers nag zoos to obtain exotic animals.

Another example is that the public wants the zoos to crossbreed animals and create freaks, like tigons and litigons, etc. Well, this used to be considered a scientific miracle but that was many decades ago, and once it has been done and proved that it could be done, it ceased to be considered scientific. Such breeding is considered a waste of zoo space and also bad animal welfare today.

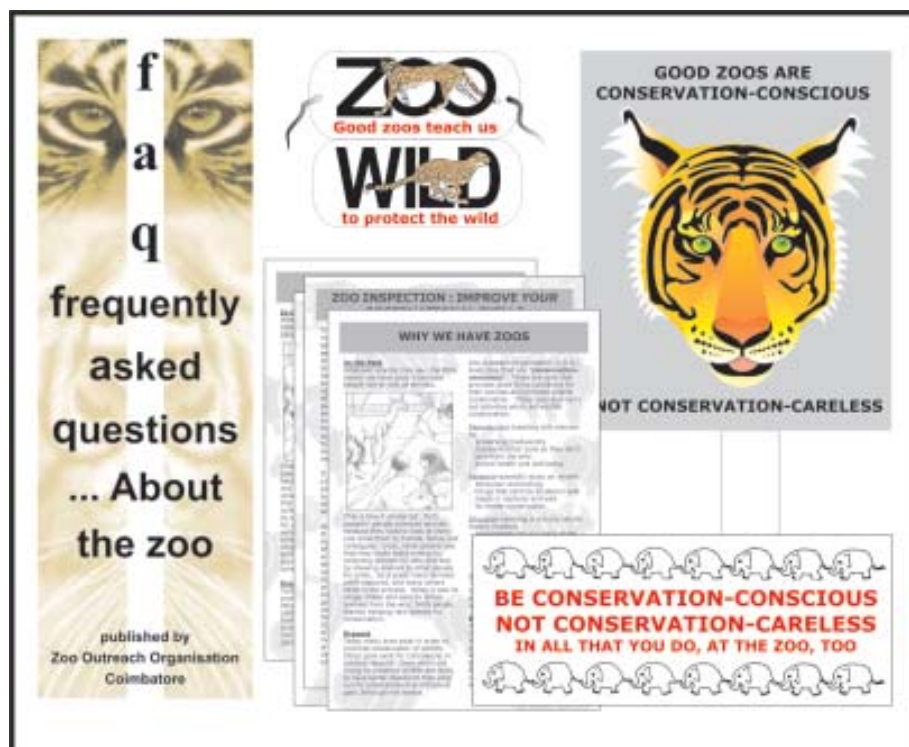
The public also wants to see the animals up close and even to touch them. Once when I was visiting relatives we went to the city zoo in Columbia, South Carolina, USA, where my aunt complained bitterly that the newly renovated zoo was awful because you couldn't see the animals up close anymore. She liked the small cages of yesteryear and didn't enjoy seeing animals in their natural habitat. She is certainly not the first or only person to voice this opinion. Apparently many people feel the same. Enough about the public's misconceptions. Zoos have to educate them. What can the public do? First they should learn about the zoo.

What about the public which visits the many conservation careless zoos in the world. Zoos that do hybridise animals and spend a lot of money furnishing their zoo with animals that they can't keep alive. And what about those zoos ... can WAZA and its membership help *all* those zoos.

We think not. We think that the public itself should know the difference between a conservation-conscious and a conservation-careless zoo and do their part to help. We at ZOO have started making educational literature to raise public awareness of what a zoo should be doing AND how they can help.

Knowing how to help is important. We know very well that running a zoo is more difficult than putting a man on the moon. Really ! Does the space programme have a small budget ? and do the scientists working on the spaceship have to tolerate or even entertain 1000's of visitors tramping through their lab.

In some cities in some countries, the general public, (the civic community) is of immense help to their zoo. Sometimes there is a zoological society that actually **runs a zoo or**



part of the zoo, such as its education programme. Or there are many groups which call themselves "Friends of the Zoo" that provide both manpower, training and funds to their city zoos.

Helping a zoo is not straightforward, however. It is easy to hurt a zoo while trying to help. So people need to know how to help, and to be careful. People need to know that bad things happen to good zoos, and to learn to provide support when the zoo has done its best but still has had a tragedy.

Last fall we distributed an educational packet which introduced the topic of good and bad zoos, animal welfare and the WAZA initiative. Some zoos and forest divisions and NGOs used this packet. We did an evaluation of sorts and found that the zoos which distributed the packet found it very useful and said it was important to visitors that such literature came from an agency outside the zoo, in order that there would be no vested interest.

Often a zoo can truly benefit by public intervention. The zoo director and his staff sometimes may not enjoy a good relationship with their superior officer. Any request they make is suspect and even very basic needs of the animals go untended due to lack of finance as a result of

this lack of trust. In such instances a member of the public can approach government more effectively since they have no financial or career stake in the zoos

How ?

How do we make it possible for the public to be helpful ?

-- Teach them which is good and not good in zoos in the modern context.

-- Warn them how much damage they can do if they speak or act before understanding.

-- Give them ideas of what to do to help without causing more work or more trouble in the zoo.

-- Suggesting ways they can do jobs (such as education) for which the zoo has no post.

-- and so on.

Now, Zoo Outreach Organisation has created another "improve zoos" packet that is more radical than the first one. It consists of a set of cards each of which discuss a different subject related to the quality of zoos and what should and should not be done by the public. The cards are the basic booklet and there are other items as well, including the brochure of Q&As, and our usual rakhi (ZOO WILD), a sticker and a placard -- all of them promoting conservation conscious behaviour, not just by zoos but by people as well. We all need to be conservation-conscious, not conservation-careless.

ZOO Packet Contents

Why we have Zoos?
 Conservation-Conscious Zoos
 Zoo Inspection : Improve *your* observational skills
 Zoo Observation Form
 Improvement, not Closure of Zoos
 How to Help?
 How You can Help?
 Hard Facts on Zoo Volunteers
 Principles for Positive Action
 How to be a good Zoo Volunteer?
 Drama at the Zoo
 Sample Dramas about the Zoo

Lets look at some Sample Dramas

Do not tease and feed animals

Participants who are going to be animals should gather behind a barrier representing an enclosure, as in a mixed species exhibit. The rest of the group, representing humans should divide into Zoo Staff and visitors. The visitors can again divide into good and bad visitors. The bad visitors role is to tease the animals and give them bad food, snacks in plastic bags and dangerous substances like cigarettes. The good visitors look on in horror. The zoo staff comes rushing and tries to save the animals from various harmful food and dangerous items, but some animals get sick and some even die. Do any animals survive? Do the animals and good visitors join together and put the bad visitors in the cage? Do they harass the bad visitors?. ***Its your drama ... you decide. Be creative.***

Political rally at the zoo !

The animals at the zoo decide they should make some of the decisions. They approach the zoo office. Zoo staff and visitors are afraid and try to hide. The animals argue that they should be involved in management. Some of their complaints:

- not enough food
- not enough entertainment
- too many visitors -- no privacy
- no choice of mates, dates or friends
- not enough hiding places in their outdoor enclosures
- inadequate security for their safety

What does the zoo staff do to satisfy the animals. Who do the visitors support? staff or animals? How do the animals make the staff and visitors understand their problems? ***Its your drama ... you decide. Be creative.***

Save the animals - conservation first!

The animals are tired of visitors coming to see them simply

for recreation. The animals feel that the visitors should be more concerned and reverent when they come to the zoo, instead of screaming and laughing and having fun at the animals' expense. They ask the zoo to organise a debate.

There are two debate teams each to decide what should be the primary purpose of the zoo. One group supports recreation and one supports conservation. The rest of your drama group is the audience which judges the winner of the debate. Don't forget to figure out how the zoo will change as a result of the debate and the decision. ***Its your drama ... you decide. Be creative.***

Crisis at the zoo - a Tsunami hits A Tsunami hits the zoo and all the visitors and the animals are caught up in it. The animals relax and float to the top of the water and are able to escape their enclosures. They are much more able to survive than the visitors. The animals use their special characters to help save the visitors. The hippo can swim and float. The giraffe can walk with his whole back out of the water. The monkeys can climb trees carrying babies on their backs. What are other animals that have special talents which would help them survive and help others in a Tsunami? Plan your drama accordingly.

Happy birthday Dear Kapil Dev !

A chimpanzee baby was born in Mysore Zoo. The zoo staff named him Kapil Dev, the famous sports star. Kapil Dev was a popular zoo animal with the whole city of Mysore at his one year birthday party at the zoo. Almost the whole city's children and their parents were represented. The birthday party was front page news in the Star of Mysore. In your drama plan a birthday party with both the Friends of Mysore Zoo and the animals as well. Let the animals also make suggestions.



If you are interested

You can order these packets to use in education free of cost from us. Because this packet is very new and possibly controversial, however, we want to evaluate the packets after they are used. We will send you two types of questionnaire, one for you as organiser to tell us how you feel the programme worked and what you think should be changed about the packet. We want to know what you feel is "over the top" and what offends you, if anything.

The other questionnaire should be filled by participants right after your programme. It may amaze you (for good or for ill) what participants learned from the programme.

If you would like to participate and will organise a programme with these packets, write to :

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 Coimbatore 641 004 T.N. India or
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Web site: www.zooreach.org