

Debate on zoos and aquariums sociology essay



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Originally, zoos were created just to show off exotic animals to the public (before this only royalty and other rich people kept menageries of wild animals). Today, the main function of zoos is conservation. Without captive breeding, many endangered species would now be extinct – for example, the golden lion tamarin, red wolf and Przewalski's horse. If endangered species were to become extinct in the wild (which sadly seems quite likely in the near future), then zoos will have preserved them for future generations, with enough genetic diversity that the possibility for reintroduction to the wild exists. In a similar way, Aquariums have contributed to the genetic evolution and manipulation of a wide amount of marine and aquatic species. The reproduction and care of aquatic animals is an important factor to take into consideration especially since 70% of the Earth's surface is covered in water. By preserving life and allowing it to be shown in a productive environment, Zoo's and Aquarium's have been harmonious in the appreciation of everyday life, especially in human society.

Two Views

First and foremost, In order to understand what Zoos and Aquariums are, it is essential to understand what Zoology is. To explain clearly, Zoology “ is the branch of biology that focuses on the structure, function, behaviour, and evolution of animals.” (Webster's Dictionary). Almost every species of living creature can be classified into a branch of zoology and studied upon. In this essay, a general branch of animals in captivity both on land and in sea, will be explored. ' Wordweb' describes a Zoo as “ the facility where wild animals are housed for exhibition.” A zoo thus consists of a number of wild animals living with each other with regards to the surrounding natural environment .

In a zoo, a wide variety of the animals caught are placed in cages or protective barriers with the intent of “display” to fascinate the audience. In this way, a zoo can breed different animals from captivity and display them to the crowd in hopes of generating a high income and profit. Furthermore, the animals may then be used as a form of entertainment and may experience training to achieve the needs or wants of the zoo. Most Zoos are located a distance away from town where they are bred in a contained location. Zoos are almost always privately owned and operated, and the animals are guarded and constantly kept under surveillance by security. Most Zoos charge for entry and offer additional paid services such as tours and snacks in hopes of gaining additional profit which is then further used to purchase new technology and breed new species.

To specialize deeper, an aquarium, or “a tank or pool or bowl filled with water for keeping live fish and underwater animals (Wordnet)” is similar to a Zoo in many ways, except that it is entirely flooded with water. In order to maintain marine life and aquatic species, which can only exist underwater or in a water-filled environment, an aquarium is necessary. Whereas Zoos are large and confined, Aquariums often consist of different shapes and sizes. Not only can fish be viewed in an aquarium outside home. Often, aquariums are located inside Zoos alongside an ocean themed area, such as SeaWorld. An aquarium is similar to a zoo in the sense that it preserves and displays marine life, whereas a Zoo shows animal species, with more emphasis on land mammals. Whereas some Zoos may contain an aquarium section, most Zoos simply focus on maintaining a broad and exotic variety of land species, such as tropical birds or elephants. Therefore, in a center dedicated to

marine studies, aquariums are necessary. Aquariums may also exist completely separate from Zoos and may have their own personalized staff to suit the needs and breed different marine creatures. Most Zoos and Aquariums are open during the day and closed during the night, to routinely follow animal sleeping habits.

The actual process of capturing animals and/or marine life is highly controversial and a very commonly debated topic among fanatics. In order for Zoos to generate a steady revenue they have to make sure that they come out on top with their animal collection. In order to build a successful animal collection a lot of Zoos capture wild animals and bring them to civilization. Furthermore, wild animals, such as fish or dolphins, are captured using highly advanced netting technology, which also tend to hurt and bruise the animals. These animals are then forced into a zoo and displayed to the general public without their consent.

Analysis

While the creation of Zoos and Aquariums can play an important role in the future of animal society and entertainment, this process is quite often viewed with controversy and much speculation regarding the complete discussion of this matter. While some argue that Zoos are often beneficial to the preservation of life and play a crucial role in developing interest, others claim that “ most visitors spend only a few minutes at each display, seeking entertainment rather than enlightenment.” (Booth) While this may be said true for certain individuals, the same is not the case with others. Among certain Zoologists, there remains a common trend where a zoologist may try to explore an animal’s characteristics in hopes of obtaining further

information about the certain species. Patterns including “ how they grew, how they had young, and how they behaved” (San Diego Zoo) among others were studied by Zoologists around the globe and ultimately this led to the development of more information about more animal species. In a similar article by the San Diego Zoo news post, it was stated that “ Zoos today still serve that important purpose: they allow us to study and find out more about animals that we would not understand otherwise.” (San Diego Zoo). This information clearly displays the fact that Zoos in fact provide further opportunities for education and understanding of the world and its denizens. Having different species available in a zoo and witnessing the beauty of each and every different animal in motion is an mind blasting experience to witness and one that truly leaves a viewer fascinated with the wonders of life. This could in turn lead to more stimulating thought and an increase in knowledge among others. Another important feature of a Zoo is the fact that simply put, Zoos help manage conservation in an emerging environment. In a world where everything is constantly changing, and where the Earth’s habitat is constantly being destroyed, Zoos help serve as a place of protection for sorts of endangered species. “ Zoos and wildlife parks are places where we can protect species that are in trouble, so they don’t disappear from the Earth completely.” (San Diego Zoo) It is important to note that Zoo’s alone have helped protect a wide variety of species which would have otherwise been completely extinct from the face of the earth. Zoo’s therefore have the capacity to be educational, to provide arenas for scientific research, and to protect species from extinction (AZA 2002).

Furthermore, The idea of sacrificing a few for the benefit of the whole comes into play in this situation. If the few animals on display in a zoo are able to

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raise awareness of the specific dilemma of an entire species, it could result in a more positive public response to conservation efforts (Lindburg 1995). As of the moment there are several wildlife organizations that have been influenced by Zoos in the sense that they seek to protect and preserve otherwise endangered wildlife species.

However, although Zoos are enjoyable and offer entertainment, they bring with them a host of problems. Firstly, limited investment in health care is becoming a big issue in the world of animals. Zoos range in size and quality- from drive-through parks to small roadside 'menageries' with concrete slabs and iron bars. More than two million people visit zoos yearly, but most zoos manage with a deficit of funds and must find ways to cut costs and/or add 'nick-knacks' that will catch the attention of visitors. The Wall Street Journal reported in 2003 that "nearly half of the country's zoos are facing cutbacks this year ... attendance, meanwhile, is down about 3% nationwide." Valuable funds that should've be put towards providing additional humane conditions for animals are often wasted on physical and external improvements. For example, landscaping, and food and gift kiosks. (Wall Street). In addition to limited investment in health care, an interesting condition among animals, known as "zoochosis", can result from being bred in captivity. An Oxford University study based on four decades of observing animals in captivity and in the wild found that animals such as polar bears, lions, tigers, and cheetahs "show the most evidence of stress and/or psychological dysfunction in captivity" and concluded that "the keeping of naturally wide-ranging carnivores should be either fundamentally improved or phased out" (PETA 2009). This behaviour can prove to be very harmful for

animals especially for those breeding future offspring. Another interesting phenomena that has resulted in the past years has been the creation of “ zoo rentals”. Zoos claim to want to protect species from extinction, which sounds like a noble goal, but zoo officials usually favour exotic or popular animals-who draw crowds and publicity-rather than threatened or endangered local wildlife. The Chinese government, for example, “ rents” pandas to zoos worldwide for fees of more than \$1 million per year, but some question whether the profits are being directed toward panda-conservation efforts at all. (The Age)

Aquariums are a completely different story altogether. Whereas the strength of the Zoo lies in its diversity and broad variety of animals, an aquarium relies on the strength and healthiness of its species as well as its size. While also watching Aquarium fish at mega sized aquarium at homes, users can keep a broad variety of small fish in their very own aquarium within the comfort of their own home, unlike a Zoo. Interestingly enough, Studies going back as far as the late 80’s have shown that gazing at aquarium fish reduces stress and subsequently lowers blood pressure. Seniors who were provided with an aquarium filled with fish had significant blood pressure reduction. Watching fish has been shown to calm children who suffer from hyperactivity disorder. Dental patients who were subjected to hypnosis vs. an aquarium experienced the same or greater benefit from the aquarium. Other studies have shown that dental patients required less pain medication after having watched fish in the office. (Sharpe 2010). In addition to mind soothing effects, starting at aquariums may cause the viewer to adapt a more healthier, non aggressive lifestyle. According to a Purdue News August 1999

Report, " Nursing Professor Nancy Edwards" tracked 60 individuals who resided in specialized units in three Indiana nursing homes. She found that patients who were exposed to the fish tanks appeared to be more relaxed and alert, and they ate up to 21 percent more food than they had before the introduction of the fish tanks. The average increase in food consumption was 17. 2 percent." Clearly, there is a direct relationship between Aquarium usage and mental stability.

Mini aquariums do require maintenance, and should not be purchased with the idea that they can be ignored for long periods of time. However, the biggest down side of small aquariums is that problems can occur swiftly, and are often fatal before they can be rectified. This is due to the small volume of water in which the fish live. Changes in water chemistry and temperature can happen in a matter of a few hours - or even minutes. Therefore it is critical to monitor the water conditions closely, and perform water changes faithfully. Also, the larger the aquarium is, the more energy used to run it. This is especially true for reef tanks that require well lighting. For reef tanks, most of the corals used come directly from the ocean reef and experts speculate that we will eventually deplete the ocean of its reefs, which take hundreds of years to grow. The fish themselves are sometimes taken directly from the ocean and most die in the process because they can never adjust to " tank life." Lastly, fish tanks are work. In general, the type of tank you have determines the level of work you want to invest in it with reef tanks being the most exhausting.

Canadian View

For Canada, this could mean a wide variety of things. Currently, around 287 hectares (710 acres), the Toronto Zoo is the third largest in the world. (CIA World Fact Book). This clearly shows that Canadians love wildlife and entertainment. For Canada to take a broader step in furthering its love for wildlife it has to dedicate its resources and open up organizations to support the noble cause of defending our planet. Canadians need to make a pact and treat the earth kindly, because if you think about it, the Earth may be “ Gaia” (Lovelocks theory). Hopefully if Canada tries to boost its image as the public defender of wildlife using its large amount of land mass to back it up, it could most definitely influence other countries in up-and-coming economies to actually make an effort to stop climate change and focus on revitalizing wildlife as well as participating in eco-friendly activities.

Conclusion

The future for Zoos and Aquariums is not a matter of time, but a matter of change. There remain a few questions to be answered: Who will initiate new changes towards the environment? There needs to be a social stability - a division - that must combine the thin line between susceptibility and self-utilization. All in all, Canada needs to brighten its ideas if it wants to enforce goals of climate change. Zoos are good for entertainment purposes, but the government must step in and gradually start focusing on the health area as well. In conclusion, it must be noted that while Zoos and Aquariums offer a variety of benefits, such as pressure-relief, environmental affection, and entertainment, they are accompanied with a wide variety of problems that could become serious if they are not dealt with in the long run.

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