

Captive orcas: do scientific benefits outweigh animal rights?

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Captive Orcas: Do Scientific Benefits Outweigh Animal Rights? The debate over whether orcas should be kept in captivity has become heated in the last few years, likely as a result of Gabriela Cowperthwaite's 2013 documentary *Blackfish*, which brought the issue to the mainstream public. Since then, the scheme of animal rights has changed, especially when it comes to killer whales.

Blackfish gave the public its first taste of anti-captivity fuel, and entertainment corporations such as SeaWorld now have to work harder than ever to maintain a humane image. Animal rights activists continually push toward the day when orcas are no longer held in parks or aquariums, while SeaWorld dissents that holding them has scientific benefits. Is it justified to imprison orcas in an attempt to better the lives of the species worldwide? Or is SeaWorld giving a flimsy excuse in order to keep making money off captive killer whales? The scientific community largely agrees that orcas should only be held in captivity if doing so will further the research and conservation of the species (Hoyt par. 3). However, there continues to be discussion of whether the primary goal of parks like SeaWorld is to help the whales.

SeaWorld argues that its research on orcas has "direct benefit for science," including aiding in knowledge of why certain whale populations are in decline. According to them, the parks are prime locations for orca research because they create a controlled setting that is "impossible to replicate in the wild" ("Research" par. 1-4). SeaWorld does publish orca research, but its contents are highly disappointing. Some horrendous examples of bad science lurk among the 52 "studies" SeaWorld had published as of 2014, <https://assignbuster.com/captive-orcas-do-scientific-benefits-outweigh-animal-rights/>

including several that are not peer reviewed, many that actually involve wild orcas, and one that is a review of a book in which the author claimed the ability to communicate with the whales (Shiffman par. 4).

If SeaWorld is using scientific research as an excuse to keep captive orcas, that research needs to be legitimate. If it continues to publish faulty studies, SeaWorld is not truly adding to the knowledge of marine life. This consistent lack of scientific morals makes it hard to believe that SeaWorld's overall goal is helping animals. Furthermore, there is the ethical question of balancing humane treatment and science experiments. It is widely accepted that keeping orcas captive is detrimental to their health, and most scientists agree that caring for an orca is a big responsibility.

Captive whales should be living in conditions that cater to their needs as animals, scientists say (Hoyt par. 2). Frankly, it is impossible to mimic wild ocean conditions perfectly, especially in parks designed for public entertainment. SeaWorld simply cannot create an environment for orcas that is as desirable as the free ocean. Scientists have been arguing since the 1980s that detaining orcas, even if they are being used for research, is not justified because of the extreme adverse effects captivity has on them (Hoyt par. 3).

SeaWorld has certainly improved since then, most notably by updating the conditions of the tanks in which the whales live. Still, their overcrowded, heavily chlorinated tanks are a far cry from the vast ocean. Even in modern times, orcas show worrying symptoms of captive life (Luscombe par. 2).

Many go blind or develop arthritis prematurely, and even SeaWorld admits

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that it sometimes separates whales that have formed strong social bonds, including mothers and their children (“ Why ‘ Blackfish’” par. 6).

The inescapable truth is that holding orcas in captivity will always be harmful to them. Scientific research is no excuse for harming living beings, especially if that research is not particularly beneficial to orcas as a species. It is doubtful that SeaWorld’s efforts will truly help wild orcas; therefore, whales should not be forced to endure life in a tank..