

Zoos: history and rescue of endangered animals

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



Introduction and Brief Analysis

It appears that nowadays, with the growth of social media allowing us to express our opinions freely, there has consequently been a significant increase in the amount of controversial questions being asked. These questions make us question the world around us and look in depth to scrutinise thoroughly the constructs that we have built, advanced and 'perfected' over the generations. In the 20th and 21st century we have found ourselves caring and increasing amount about animals and their welfare. The existence of television adverts, news stories and magazines constantly shared throughout the world alert and update us about the threat of the extinction of species such as the Amur Leopard, Sumatran Rhinoceros and the Peruvian Black Spider Monkey. These constant updates and warnings shared in our society creates a picture of social obligation that we should try and do what we can to save these animals, whether it's through donations of money monthly or through travelling to exotic countries for six months to help animal conservation projects protect and nurse endangered species back to health we all somehow feel as if we should do our best to preserve animals and nature so that future generations can enjoy it just as we have. However, there is a great deal of controversy surrounding the protection of wild animals and our perhaps hypocritical roles we play within it, this comes down to the fact that we, as humans, have created establishments that maintain collections of wild animals in a park or gardens, for study, conservation or display to the public and a glass container in which fish and other water creatures can be kept which we may recognise by their common names as zoos and aquariums.

These manmade structures cause a major amount up public uproar among some animal conservation groups such as Freedom for animals, who believe that the role of humans plays a large and seemingly hypocritical role in the movement for the conservation of wild animals. It can be expressed that the existence of economically driven and thriving zoos and aquariums in our modern world ultimately adds to the problem rather than helps solves it as the construct and ideas of zoos in themselves have many flaws within them such as their treatment of wild animals and their conditions they are kept in , the argument that wild animals should be left to roam free in the world and the ethics behind him , and the idea that zoos are less about animal conservation and protection and are mainly focalized around economic gain. In the modern world these issues and arguments are being considered more and more throughout the years as the topic of animal captivity and preservation comes to light through scandals in the media such as the boycotting sea world movement and documentaries such as inside the tanks by Jonny Meah shedding light on tragic incidents that happen as a result of sea life captivity for entertainment, However despite the negative image portrayed on zoos in the perspective of bad scandals there are advantages of animal captivity and progress being made from its original forms towards ensuring the best life is given to those animals in captivity. The ethics of the captivity of animals in zoos and aquariums are constantly changing over time as in the 21st century we have seemingly developed a greater awareness and compassion towards the welfare of animals and their preservation of them for future generations. How ethical is it considered now in this century to have a society that maintains these archaic constructs such

as zoos and aquariums whilst also having an increasingly concerned and passionate society about animal welfare is a conflicting subject due to the nature of the situation by the economic and entertainment dependency and the issue of needing to preserve animals and keep them in their natural habitat without us hunting them and taking them to foreign countries for economic gain in the disguise of concern for preservation. The confusion of this subject in the modern world is becoming a larger and more important concern as we continue to ask ourselves to what extent is animal captivity ethical?

The History of Animal Captivity in Zoos

Over the centuries the way in which animals have been captured, used and treated has changed drastically through the increasing awareness and concern of their welfare and wellbeing. This increasing awareness has consequentially led to the constructs of animal captivity constantly changing as society concern and investment widens. For thousands of years' people have collected and kept animals as symbols of power and dominance. In the 17th and 18th centuries royal collections of zoos called menageries, were turned into zoos and open to the public, this was ultimately the beginning of the economic development of zoos as the concept from this development became less about dominance and status and more about economic gain. Despite the fact that zoos had been already established in Paris, Vienna and Madrid, the 1826 established London zoo was the first 'modern zoo' where it was described as a place for the fellows of the zoological society to have a study collection. However, they began to realise the economic prospects of this space due to constant interest from friends and acquaintances and so

decided to expand the once research based construct to a public attraction by opening it up to visiting days to the broader public. By 1830s The London zoo had become a large public space in Regent's park and by the 1840s there was a carnivore terrace for the lions and lawns to accompany for people picnicking upon. These cages were barred and quite small and lacked a substantial amount of vegetation within them.

As one can guess, with concerns for this type of living conditions zoos in 1840s London were unable to keep wild animals along for a very long time - perhaps due to the poor conditions, wrong climate and diet they were kept in. At this time scientists didn't know much about animals diets, appropriate group composition and their reproduction, this all added to the fact and concern that animals were kept in inappropriate and ethically wrong conditions due to the lack of knowledge that humans acquired from study and so as one may suggest in a way suffering from the absence of information that humans possessed. These conditions were further compromised and given as second class issues due to the widespread concern of disease, these smaller, sterile cages that animals were subjected to live the remainder of their then short lives in were easier to clean out and so were beneficial on that regard. Towards the end of the 19th century the ways in which animals were displayed were revolutionized by Carl Hagenbeck. Hagenbeck in the 1880s had become the figure in the international trade of animals by sourcing exotic animals for zoos from around the world and boosting their appeal to the public as well as economic success. Hagenbecks ideas for his zoo was a modern view as he set out to display animals as you would expect to see them in the wild by separating

them from the public through the use of moats - channeling the ideas and image to the public that these bar-less exhibits gave a realistic insight to what animals behave like in the wild without un natural restrictions such as metal bars. Hagenbecks zoo embodied many of the principles that zoos use to this day such as the preferred animal friendly ideas of open enclosures without barred cages. Towards the second half of the 20th century Hagenbecks ideas inspired a reinvention of zoo design, During the 1970s, Woodland Park zoo in seattle opened, this time was pivotal for animals conserbvation and captivity rights as there was an increasing interest in the ethology and social biology of animals and there was an increasing amount of studies being conducted into animals ecology and behavior. This increasing awareness and interest means that this knowledge now gained was used benefitially for the animals to build new exhibits that were more appropriately made for animals. These exhibits allowed these animals to express as large a percentage of their behavior as they would in the wild, these exhibits tended to have more extensive vegetation and the exhibits started to become larger and more complex. Developme t continued throughout the 1990s through environmental enrichment where there wasn't the sterility and boredom or previous and older exhibits being shown in the new more modern zoos, the aforementioned qualities were being abolished due to initiatives and developments such as primates being fed by spreading seeds in the grass, similar to in nature and a more realistic environment for these animals were being established and created with more complex thinking behind these animals rather than the once standardized practicality of their welfare.

Woodland Park zoo became known for its immersion exhibit where people stood on one side of a moat looking into an exhibit where animals were living in their recreated to the best ability wild. The Imersion exhibit was revolutionary and was considered the next step in the evolution of zoo design as the intentions were modernised to fit more ethically with the animals welfare and the concern was emphasized by making the visitor feel part of the animals environment despite the true situation being vice versa. Along with the evolution of exhibit design came new ideas about the purpose of zoos and our relationship with the animals in them as the purpose of zoos had been distorted over the years for better and the worse into zoos having multi-functional use such as recreation, science, education and the newest and most modern concept/ function: conservation. As the infrastructure of zoos progressed over years it was seemingly inevitable that the concern for the animals kept within these structures were increasing as a result. The 20th and 21st century has seen a more diligent care and concern being taken for animals and so therefore has seen conservation take a wider stance on the agenda of zoos aims. There was high pressure for improovements for animaks welfare and the wellbeing if animals in captivity, this pressure is partly due to the growing public ethic regarding zoo animaks and conservation more generally.

However there is still a clear distinction between those advocating for animal welfare and those who advocate for animal rights as made clear by. Animal rights typically have a stronger conceot than animak welfare despite both leading to some people believing that its unfair and unethical to keep animals in wild cages. However where a animal welfare activist will settle

with naturalistic sites close to the environment these wild animals come from, such as the Ford Foundations gorilla exhibit in Atlanta, an animal rights activist will argue that despite the conditions being as ideal as they are able to be for an enclosed animals these animals are still deprived and suffering because they are still not wild and free. Animal rights activists are more concerned with the fundamental idea of zoos that still in theory exist today despite more research and care being put into these constructs and that is the unacceptable idea that animals are kept in cages. In the 21st century it is made a fact that most animals in zoos nowadays are born and bred in zoos rather than captured in the wild, yet regardless of this fact the role that modern zoos play in their newly established role of conservation means that they have to balance the issues associated with keeping these animals in captivity. This conflict is partly due to the confusion on whether the debate should be focusing on animal rights or animal welfare as the modern community tends to be much more accepting of zoos and having these animals in exhibits as ambassadors for their species that are threatened in the wild. Many are also further supportive of the role Zoos can play in the captive on conservation breeding and reintroduction by assisting research and sharing knowledge with conservation organisations.

However for modern opponents of zoos their role in conservation does not justify the need to keep animals in captivity due to the fact that all animals in zoos are denied everything that is natural and important to them. Every aspect of their lives are manipulated and controlled as they are fed routines that aren't experienced in the wild such as when and what to eat, when to sleep and who to mate with. There are even large flaws within breeding

programmes where we are led under sometimes false pretences where sometimes less 'cute' adult animals are traded, loaned, sold or put down when no longer wanted. There is also the large and sometimes overshadowed by the image and push for conservation fact that most animals housed in zoos are not endangered and those that are will very likely never be released into natural habitats. This is due to the fact that these animals have been denied the chance and opportunity to learn highly necessary survival skills. It may be expressed that if zoos really cared about conservation they would be making greater efforts to remove or extinguish the unnatural causes that cause animals to 'require' saving such as poaching. If zoos true only goal is animal conservation then the efforts made to protect in the wild are minimal and insignificant triggering ones belief that zoos may be operating, especially in the 21st century on more economically driven ideas and concepts. Maybe the issue in the 21st century is with the public perception of zoos as we as the public want zoos to take on the image of a type of utopic deathless environment and as the public we don't truly understand the reality of running a zoo. This is a large issue as the public see themselves within their own ethical conflict of whether zoos should exist- as they go against animal rights yet we enjoy their entertainment factors despite their controversial and questionable ethics. Determining what comes first: entertainment or ethics is a question that is left to the future history of zoos.

Why Should We Save Endangered Species

When it comes to animal captivity and its ethics one may look towards the topic of conservation. Conservation appears to be the focal point that zoos

try to steer the public into focusing on. The conservation of endangered species appears to be the most emotionally impactful method that zoos are given approval from the public who believe that these animals need to be protected from dangers that are in their natural habitat such as poachers. The nature of the media constantly surrounds us with emotive stories of how wildlife such as elephants and polar bears are on the brink of becoming extinct due to man made factors such as climate change melting the polar ice caps or poachers hunting their tusks. It is made to appear to the majority of the audiences that conservation is the only option to protect these endangered species and consequently zoos are the only and best place to do so. But why must we save endangered species is one of the most fundamental and widely discussed topics in regards to conservation. It will cost billions of pounds to save the worlds threatened species and it appears that there is little in it for us, the apparent sponsor for this initiative. When discussing why we must save endangered species it is key to surround oneself with the very little talked about in the media, success stories of how conservation initiatives have succeeded their mission in protecting a species that has been close to extinction. Around 40 years ago the population of mountain gorillas was at rock bottom of only 254 in a small mountain range in central Africa, this devastatingly low population was due to the fact that humans had invaded their habitat and had brought large dangers such as civil war and poaching that would inevitably have a large impact on their population.

In 2012 it was reported that after just 30 years the population was up to 880 which was a big improvement from their previous populations, however

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despite the obvious success and improvement, their population numbers in hindsight is still critically low and the mountain gorillas remain severely endangered. It can be proven using the case of the mountain gorillas that humans can and have the opportunity to right their previous wrongs when given the opportunity and proves how the mission to save endangered species is not a lost cause as we can be successful over time. But On the other hand one may argue that this mission isn't needed as there is no value of endangered species to us despite being proved as achievable, this is due to the lack of awareness that is brought forward to the public in the role nature plays within our lives and the actual need to save endangered species regardless of aesthetics. One major concern for all is the large cost of saving endangered species. A study in 2012 estimated that it would cost £49 billion a year to preserve threatened land animals and saving the threatened marine animals might well cost far more. So why should we spend all that money on wild life seems to be the most obvious question. It's a fact well known that species go extinct all the time naturally, regardless of human interference, the biggest and most obvious mass extinction that happened with the absence of humans is the extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Yet as one may ask if it's a natural process and so therefore why should we stop it, the main reason is that it's because the extinction rate has increased a hundredfold over the last century and we seem to be to blame for this and so because of this we should feel obligated to reverse our wrongs and prevent the rate increasing.

Another, perhaps less guilty reason is the simple reason of us just wanting to save the endangered species due to our love of the natural world and the

cute, majestic or fascinating animals within it. Our appreciation of nature and our desire for it to exist for the rest of our lives as a constant is enough to fuel the large movement to protecting endangered species that reside in nature, but only to a certain extent as where aesthetics play a part, the reality takes over and the fact of nature being beautiful doesn't suffice. We need a more practical reason to keep animals around other than just aesthetics. This reason may be because nature contains useful things such as medicines and the question of "what if a plant goes extinct that could be the cure for cancer" is a scary one as with the reality of our ecosystems this possibility becomes more and more likely. Another reason comes from the fact that just the existence of plants and animals benefit us, these benefits are largely overlooked and taken for granted, especially in this debate. One obvious reason is that many of our crop plants rely on insects to produce seeds and without them we would not survive. Overall it appears that the economics of the need to save endangered species becomes a focalizing point which puts all arguments into retrospect where the reality, found in 1997, was that the biosphere provides services worth around £33 trillion a year and by conserving biodiversity the benefits would outweigh the costs by a factor of 100. And so it appears that all these arguments for saving endangered species allude to ultimately everybody benefits in the long haul and that is enough an incentive to conserve animals and nature as a whole. However how this should be done and how ethically it's currently done is a question I hope to answer as the lines appear to be blurred between ethics and conservation.