

Are the values added by zoos today enough to justify captivity of animals?

Introduction

According to Rutledge et al (National Geographic, 2011)^[1] a zoo or zoological garden is a facility where animals are kept in cages, are looked after, researched on and bred for conservation purposes.

The values of zoos in the modern world includes saving endangered animals from extinction, educating, entertainment and raising awareness among visitors. Researches often take place in zoos and aquariums to judge animal's behaviors and other factors that can help in animal conservation. They try to spread their message and stop harm to animals (aboutzoos, 2016)^[3]. The reason I chose this topic is that in Pakistan recently on November 24 2021 a white lion in Karachi Zoo died due to negligence shown by zookeepers (S. Khan, dw, 2021)^[2]. There are 10,000 zoos around the world (bornfree, nd)^[5]. In article by Isakov (Petpedia, 2021)^[3] it is stated that 75% of zoos exhibit animal abuse and surplus animals in zoos are often killed and according C. Henn (OneGreenPlanet, 2020)^[15] even traded. This makes this a global issue. However some exemplary Zoos such as Phoenix Zoo, San Diego Wild Animal Park and the Los Angeles Zoo have helped save animals (Treehugger, no date)^[6].

This report will answer whether the values are fulfilled by the zoos. It will also consist of arguments for and against the topic based on perspectives of former animal trainers and animal welfare workers. The report also includes Costa Rica, America and Pakistan's perspective. It will conclude with my opinion.

Types of zoos

According to Rutledge et al (National Geographic, 2011)^[1] state there are many different kinds of zoos such as safari parks where people drive around animals that roam freely, urban zoos where animals are kept captive and game reserves which are large lands of ecosystems where animals are kept and hunting of some animals is legal. Sea worlds are also accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums which accredited zoos and aquariums and the people that work there (AZA, 2017)^[7] and seaworld is also a member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) which has the global alliance of zoos and aquariums which help conserve animals. According to Wikipedia aquariums are also zoos for aquatic animals^[13].

Entertainment

Entertainment animals are those that amuse their audiences, animals used for entertainment can be domesticated or wild (encyclopedia.com, 2022, p1)^[8]. Research by Kim (2022, Sentient Media, p6)^[9] states that zoos usually use big wild animals for people to come, pay and watch, marine parks use dolphins and orcas, to promote people to come and pay a visit. In same article according to philosopher Peter Singer animals are tortured when they are taught tricks. According to Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation^[12] many zoos and aquariums only take care of the desires of the visitors over the needs of the captive animals, most zoos breed animals to show them to the public rather than preserving their species. Animals often exhibit unnatural behavior such as jumping in cages and swaying when they feel stress which is called zoochosis. (National Geographic, 2019)^[12].

According to (World Animal Protection UK,2022)^[14] a former dolphin trainer shares what happens in dolphinariums. She tells dolphins are not given enough food, are forced to go under reproduction programs and live in pools full of chemical mixed water and some dolphins fight each other and leave rake marks. Moreover, to a worker of World Animal Protection, it feels unethical to train dolphins to do tricks as they are taught in a way that they are only fed when they do the tricks appropriately.

As mentioned in All About Animal Training-Benefits of Animal Training (SeaWorld Parks&Entertainment,n.d.)^[16] SeaWorld states that their parks provide not only entertainment but also education. Mentioned in the article by Aza(2011)^[17] CEO of AZA states that accredited zoos also provide jobs to people and are also faithful to their values of wildlife conservation and science education. Furthermore, renowned economist Dr Stephen Fuller's report states that the AZA zoos supply 16 billion \$ to the economy and provide 142,000 jobs with adequate salary. This means that just ending the zoos can deteriorate the economy and cause joblessness. Moreover, as per Children Learn More at Zoos and Aquariums (oceansoffun,2012)^[33] article that shares information about Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums poll that included views of 1,000 adults and 97% said that zoos, wild parks and aquariums provide children a chance to learn about animals and therefore their role is of significance.

Captive breeding—Wildlife Conservation

According to Wikipedia (2022)^[18] The practice of protecting wild species and their habitats is known as wildlife conservation. As mentioned by Conservation Breeding (Wildlife Preservation Canada,2016)^[19] breeding animals in captivity of facilities such as zoos is known as conservation breeding.

As per Marcy Karyln(2021,May26,Aza)^[31] there are 900 endangered species specified by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) but there are 8,700 species of animals kept in zoos worldwide, this means many animal species that are not endangered are also kept in zoos.

Furthermore, captive breeding comes with its own set of issues such as inbreeding, that is the mating of organisms with which are genetically close (Wikipedia contributors, 2022)^[23] and other problems such as genetic changes due to environmental changes and living in closed environments (Malo .et al,OUP Academicl,2010)^[22]. Inbreeding can have negative impacts that include reduced fertility rates in offspring, increase in infant deaths, decrease in birth rate, small size of adults and increased risk of offspring getting a genetic disease (ThoughtCo, 2020)^[24].

Since animals are captive bred to be reintroduced, Goldman's (Conservation,2021)^[25] article included the research of Zoologist Brendan Slade who observed the phenomena of 'assortative mating' in which wild and captive bred mostly mated with their type of bred mice. This means this can affect other animals that are reintroduced in their natural habitat and wild animals of the same species may die out. And according to Wents(2018)^[21] some animals were threatened when they were reintroduced but in the same article it is stated that sockeye salmon black-footed ferret are examples of reintroduced animals that did not face this difficulty.

However, according to Owen's (Animals,2021) ^[26] article that included the words of animal behavior researcher Kristen Jules that reintroduced carnivore animals fail to survive in the wild because living in captive environments they do not fear humans and rely on food from them which leads them lacking hunting skills, they are also more vulnerable to viruses and diseases than the wild species.

On the contrary some zoos do provide reintroduction programs that allow animals raised in zoos to go back to their habitats ,field conservation that studies ways animals can survive in their natural habitats and conservation breeding that helps animals to increase their population^[9]..And according to Gabriela Mastromonaco (TEDx Talks, 2014)^[27] and Purdue University^[20] species such as black footed ferret,vancouver island marmot,arabian oryx and red wolf have been saved because of captive breeding programs .

Global perspectives

According to Costa Rica Shuts Down Its Zoos - An Animal Rights Article from All-Creatures.Org(All-Creatures.Org, 2013)^[28] the article talks about the national policy of no wildlife in captivity , Environment Vice Minister Ana Lorena defends this action by saying she wants to see wild animals in places that are close to their habitats and one way to do this to put them into reserves. Environment Minister René Castro also states that he does not want animals in captivity, it is only allowed in cases that involve conserving animals. In the research of McCarriston (YouGov,2017)^[11] it is mentioned that 25% Americans did not have the same opinion a decade ago but they are now discontent at the roles of zoos and aquariums due to documentaries .However,73% of Americans still support zoos and aquariums.

Personal Reflection:

The state of zoos and aquariums vary around the world. I am of the opinion, that how animals are treated in these zoos depends upon the value the local people place on animals in general and how they perceive their importance to be in their daily lives. Asian countries, although have large population but they have low adoption rates (petfoodindustry, 2016). Generally pet adoption rates are low in Asia which may show how much inclination people would have for animals in general. I feel that there is a feeling of indifference towards animals in general. This may translate in neglect for the affairs of animals in general.

National Perspective

As per Tribune(2021)^[29] after it was made apparent in news the fault of zoo in the death of a white lion ,pakistani celebrities were outraged and demanded zoos to be banned .Moreover it has been witnessed multiple times that Pakistanis zoos (Mirza, 2012)^[35] and sellers(Tribune,2021)^[34] treat animals abusively. Furthermore, there are little to no laws for domestic or wild animal rights and the laws that are present are no good as they are not implemented.

Courses of actions

According to How robots could end animal captivity in zoos and marine parks | Just Might Work (Youtube,Freethink,2021)^[30] shows the work of Walt Conti the CEO of Edge Innovation that is an animatronic dolphin that perfectly fitted in as a real dolphin by fooling other animals .This idea has been set to free the captive marine animals in parks and educate humans . Right now it is costly but it would be able to save many marine animals from abuse and mistreatment whilst providing the audience with entertainment and education.

As per Owen's (Animals,2021)^[26]article carnivore conservation program manager Sarah Christie states that she plans on breeding amur leopards in enclosure that are similar to their habitats to provide them with a chance to hunt for themselves and less human contact then release them as young animals.

Evaluation of sources

This report is based on all the sources mentioned in the sources list ,but some lacked credibility.As credibility of a source depends on its recency,its authors authority over the subject and lack of biases .In the report some sources were outdated or even lacked the date and the author name such as bornfree^[5],Encyclopedia.com^[8],Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation.^[9] and etc . Much information on these sites was not backed up by any expert or professional either besides not having an author mentioned . Moreover many sites showed biasness over the matter discussed , they either focus on zoos being good or bad , most of these sites were animal protection sites such as bornfree.org,Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation . however, mostly their perspectives and factual reasons for the for or against arguments were taken into account .Many sources however, were handpicked and most have a trustworthy author with the authority to write such as OUP Academic^[22],Conservation.^[25],The Guardian^[29],some of these websites were for news which had information and contained statements from reliable sources.

Conclusion

Since I have discussed some perspectives of countries such as Costa Rica ,America and Pakistan now I would conclude the report with my perspective.

Prior to my research I was adamant that zoos do not justify animal captivity since many zoos I knew of including the zoo in my locality were not living up to their values .But as I delved deep into zoos, I came across zoos that do fulfill the values of zoos ,some species are still around due to their efforts , moreover in my research i came across many perspectives of people working with animals in zoos and how they were able to help those animals. However, my opinion is not fully swayed.

I suggest sanctuaries should keep animals as they are big enough for animals , are usually the animals natural habitats and not all people can visit them. I would also recommend the staff should be accredited to look after the animals but this might be too expensive for the sanctuaries as they usually get money from fundraisers and donations.