http://upfront.scholastic.com/issues/11\_21\_16/are-zoos-ethical/

“Are Zoos Ethical?”

The idea of the zoo goes way back: Archaeologists have discovered evidence of a zoo belonging to the pharaohs in ancient Egypt, and Chinese emperors around 1000 B.C. are known to have kept large animals in cages. But it wasn’t until the early 19th century that public zoos began appearing, in European cities like Paris and London. The first American zoo opened in Philadelphia in 1874.

Today, there are more than 200 zoos in the United States. Last May, a 3-year-old boy fell into the gorilla enclosure at the Cincinnati Zoo, prompting authorities to shoot and kill a 17-year-old lowland gorilla named Harambe. The incident shocked Americans and rekindled a long-standing debate about the ethics of zoos and aquariums and keeping animals in captivity.

YES

In a world where some of our favorite animals—including lions, cheetahs, frogs, elephants, and others—are at risk of vanishing forever like the dinosaurs, zoos are a safe haven from [**poaching**](javascript:;), habitat loss, climate change, and disease. Zoos provide protected space for animals where we can study them and work to minimize the threats—with the ultimate goal of returning endangered species to wild spaces.

**Conservation** is the primary function of zoos. Consider the case of the black-footed ferret: In the United States, habitat loss and disease had wiped the animals out, and people thought the species was extinct. After a few dozen wild ferrets were discovered in 1981, zoos brought the animals into human care in 1985. They worked with the federal government to learn about and breed the animals, and have been returning ferrets to the wild. Today, 1,000 black-footed ferrets live in the wild—all because zoos prevented their extinction.

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Zoos are returning other species to their native habitats too: the scimitar-horned oryx (similar to an antelope), Przewalski’s horses (an endangered species of wild horse), a kind of monkey called the golden lion tamarin, and California condors, just to name a few. U.S. zoos and aquariums spend about $160 million a year to save species. Zoos allow scientists to get up close to the animals to learn about their behavior, reproduction, and genetics—all of which are key to helping save them. Scientists don’t have this kind of access in the wild.

Zoos also inspire visitors to take action in their own lives to help conserve wildlife. More than 180 million people visit American zoos each year, giving them the opportunity to connect with and learn about animals.

If animals can’t live safely in their wild homes, we want to make sure they thrive in human care, and we want to partner with other researchers, governments, businesses, and nonprofits to tackle conservation comprehensively. Saving species is an evolving and ongoing commitment. That’s why zoos are not only ethical—they’re critical.

*—DENNIS KELLY,*

Director, Smithsonian’s National Zoo, Washington, D.C.

NO

Zoos are first and foremost about entertainment, and the stars of the show are unwilling participants: caged animals. In zoos, animals are typically denied everything that makes their lives meaningful, and virtually every aspect of their existence is controlled and [**manipulated**](javascript:;) to maximize visitor satisfaction.

Zoos cannot possibly replicate wild animals’ habitats. American law requires only that animals in zoos be provided with enough space for them to stand up, lie down, turn around, and take a few steps. Animals that would normally roam or fly over vast territories are forced to exist in a world measured in square feet.

Zoos provide animals with few opportunities to engage in natural behavior and little mental stimulation. In these artificial, restricted conditions, animals may have a mental breakdown and develop “zoochosis”—a form of psychosis that can cause them to sway or pace continually, chew on their own limbs until they bleed, or pull out their own fur or feathers. Some zoos dispense antidepressants and other drugs to curb such abnormal and self-destructive behavior.

Zoos are about entertainment, and the stars of the show are unwilling participants.

And even though zoos claim to provide educational opportunities, most visitors spend only a short time at each display and afterward typically report, when asked, that they’ve learned nothing from the exhibits. Scientists, meanwhile, struggle to learn anything about natural behavior from animals that are forced to live in an unnatural setting.

As for conservation, zoos tend to favor exotic or popular animals—that draw crowds—rather than threatened or endangered local wildlife. Most animals housed in zoos are not endangered, and those that are will likely never be released into their rightful habitat. Most zoos’ research is geared toward finding ways to breed and maintain more animals.

Forcing animals to live in cramped cages from birth until death just so that people can be distracted and amused for a few hours is ethically indefensible. 

*—MARTA HOLMBERG,*

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

* taken from *The New York Times* *UpFront*  magazine: November 21, 2016

**List of Pros and Cons of Zoos**

[OccupyTheory](https://occupytheory.org/author/occupytheoryadmin/)

on 7 February, 2015 at 12:00 https://occupytheory.org/list-of-pros-and-cons-of-zoos/

Zoos are present all over the world, it is a great way for people to learn about wild animals without having to put themselves in danger, or travel to other parts of the world. People want to admire these animals and the power of nature itself, but many are not aware of the circumstances and lives that caged animals lead.

People should questions themselves about how these animals live inside the zoo. Would they have a better life in the wild? Is the zoo preserving the existence of this species? The thing is, these issues are directly related to environmental problems. Although most people who visit the zoo don’t think about these issues, other people do, and there are incredibly heated debates about this subject pretty much everywhere – provided we look for these debates.

**Pros of Zoos**

**1.** As far as animal rights go, zoos play a crucial role. It is well debated that animals have no rights in zoos, but we need to look at things from another point of view. If we look at how animals are being hunted right now, we can see how zoos are great for them. Animals are being hunted down for a lot of reasons, including their fur, ivory, some medical benefits (that aren’t proven), and sometimes even for their meat. This is terrible, and zoos can act as safe havens for these animals.

**2.** Animals have been subjected to cruel treatment in the past when they were in zoos. This has changed, however, because people actually knew about it and noticed it, and it damaged the reputation of zoos itself and threatened their business. They realized this and their treatment towards animals has been continuously improving over time. In fact, animals are started to get the treatment of kings when they are in zoos, all because they are the livelihood of the business. Moreover, the few zoos that mistreated animals have been caught, and are being targeted for these actions.

**3.** When it comes to education, zoos are also playing a very important role. School children are curious about animals and see them everywhere in their daily lives, and an opportunity to go to the zoo and see them for real is amazing for them. With this opportunity, they enjoy learning about animals and endangered species. Zoos have added signs to most places where animals are located in order to inform people about them too, including their natural habitat, how many there still are in the world, what they eat, and so on. Not only school children, but pretty much everyone can get informed about animals at zoos, as they start to raise awareness towards important issues regarding animals.

**4.** Finally, zoos are crucial to protect endangered species. As mentioned before, animals are being hunted down pretty much for existing, and zoos are keeping them safe against hunters and other types of malicious people. Zoos aren’t paradise, obviously, but they do act as a safe haven for these hunted animals.

**List of Cons of Zoos**

**1.** Capturing animals is cruel, period. Animals have their own rights, and they have their own lives in the wild. Capturing them destroys their routines and their way of life. For example elephants travel long distances in the wild in large groups that is their way of life. When elephants are in a zoo, they can’t travel long distances, in fact, the amount they can move can barely be named as worthy of travel.

**2.** Moreover, animals that are confined to the zoo suffer from negative psychological effects due to the confinement. It doesn’t really matter how good the facilities of the zoo are, or how much space the animal has for itself, it will still not be comparable in any way to the freedom they would have in the wild.

**3.** Furthermore, animals that are born in zoos and confined to their boundaries their whole life never get to see their natural habitat, and never get to live life like they should be living it. This is something that can be noticed by their abnormal behavior, since they’re not where they should be – it is not natural for them. If these animals ever get released to the wild for any reason, they will have an extremely difficult time adapting to their natural habitat, because they had absolutely no former experience of it. They were taken care of all their lives, and now have to provide for themselves, something they are not used to.

**4.** Regarding education in zoos, although they do provide a lot of it, most of us go to the zoo as a way to spend time and for recreational purposes. No one really goes visit the zoo with the same mentality people visit the museum with. Moreover, some visitors actually don’t care about the well-being of animals, and many of them actually abuse them by throwing them objects, teasing them, yelling at them, and so on. This kind of behavior has an extremely negative effect on animals, and it can often result in psychological damage to animals, and sometimes it can even prove to be fatal. Animals caged in zoos aren’t able to exhibit their natural behavior as they should, and teasing them will greatly damage their self-confidence and their comfort in the zoo itself.