



present the symposium

ZOO EXPERIENCES AND THE HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF SAVING WILDLIFE

Thursday 24 and Friday 25 May 2007

Organised by John Fraser, Carol D. Saunders and Thomas Webler

The Meeting Rooms, The Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY, UK
www.zsl.org/science/scientific-meetings

Zoos and aquariums tend to focus on saving wildlife through animal management and science learning. They also have the potential to influence cultural and moral development as well as social change. But in order to realize that potential, they need to focus their attention more systematically on the human dimensions of conservation, with more input from the social sciences.

This two-day symposium explores the moral, psychological, social and cultural aspects of zoos and zoo-going from the perspective of the social sciences. It will review what is known about visitor experiences at zoos and aquariums, and how these institutions contribute to biodiversity literacy. Also included will be insights from the new field of conservation psychology about nature experiences and conservation behaviors. In addition, presenters and participants will discuss the provocative role that zoos and aquariums can play in the development of an environmental ethic and the shaping of social norms and societal discourse. The goal is to help zoo/aquarium professionals gain an understanding of the cultural significance of their institutions and help them become more effective conservation advocates.

Contributors to the program include noted scholars and authors from outside the traditional zoological sciences community, who will challenge traditional zoo pedagogy by applying a rigorous assessment of how the social sciences might redefine the role of zoos and aquariums in society and how that role can be more effectively used to advance the conservation agenda.

Audience

The audience for this symposium includes advanced-thinking zoo/aquarium directors, senior managers and other conservation professionals. This symposium is designed for professionals with extensive experience in the field of zoo/aquarium management that recognize the need to advance conservation values in their communities, but do not have training in the social sciences. The discussion sessions will allow the audience to help shape the conversation by helping develop a shared language that will allow the presenting scholars to contextualize their work for the audience.

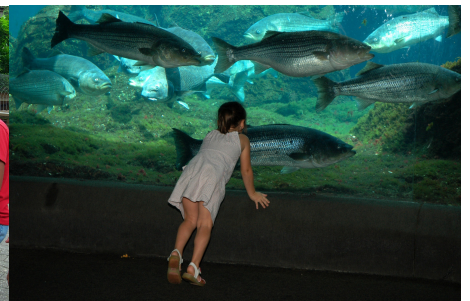
A special poster session will focus on recent research findings that demonstrate how zoos and aquaria can contribute to the development of a shared set of values regarding wildlife conservation.

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Zoo Experiences and the Human Dimensions of Saving Wildlife

Draft Programme

Welcome/Introductions/Chairs: Ralph Armond (ZSL, UK), John Fraser (WCS, USA), Carol D. Saunders (Chicago Zoological Society, USA) & Thomas Webler (Antioch University New England, USA)

Contributors

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Wharton, Dan, Director, City Zoos, WCS, USA

**THURSDAY 24 MAY – Draft Programme:
VISITOR EXPERIENCES AT ZOOS/AQUARIUMS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO BIODIVERSITY LITERACY**

Session 1 – Thursday morning: The role of zoos in providing visitor experiences of animals & nature.

In this opening session, discussants will summarize the call for more information about the human dimensions of conservation that has emerged in recent years within the zoo and aquarium professional community. The conservation mission of zoos and aquariums became a commonly accepted goal in the 1990's but the contribution of the social sciences has lagged behind the field sciences realization of this mission. This discussion will outline the need for information, areas of concern across the zoo and aquarium community, and basic questions regarding potential conceptual barriers that are limiting the zoo and aquarium community from fully engaging in active cultural change. The session will conclude with an open discussion for all attendees on the topics raised in the session.

09.00–09.30 hours

Introduction and Welcome

09.30–10.15 hours

Linking zoos and aquariums to the social sciences: where do zoos/aquariums need to be in the future to best support their conservation missions?

- European perspectives on culture and social responsibility
- The under-appreciated ocean: rethinking how we describe our world
- The future of zoos revisited: a new paradigm for measuring the conservation mission

10.15–10.30 hours **BREAK**

10.30–11.30 hours

Introduction to the contributors, the perspectives they bring and how this could contribute to understanding how zoos/aquariums are situated in the conservation movement

11.30–12.30 hours

Overview of visitor-studies literature related to visitor experiences of animals/nature

- Considering the social value of zoos and aquariums
- Reconsidering how and when zoo and aquarium learning happens
- Describing the experience of social learning in terms of zoo/aquarium visits

12.30–13.30 hours **LUNCH**

Session 2 – Thursday afternoon: Philosophies of learning at zoos, the social development of biodiversity literacy, and zoos in the nature space. Chair: John Fraser

This session expands the discussion introduced in the morning session to address learning pedagogies that frame zoo and aquarium programs and an assessment of the phenomena that accompany a zoo visit. Considered through the lenses of sociological and psychological research, this session will address the models that have been used to identify when learning contributes to conservation change, how outcomes may be assessed from the perspective of a conservation mission and an overview of a few select case studies to illustrate how conservation advances can be accomplished.

13.30–15.00 hours

- What we are learning about environmental concern from leisure-studies research?

Case studies. Witnessing learning experiences and the antecedents of social change

- Three case studies. Family experiences in zoos and aquariums, and results of audience research
- Three case studies. Reframing the exhibit design pedagogy to avoid denial and rejection: thinking about ecophobia, trauma and the emotions attached to conservation activism

Questions and discussion

15.00–15.30 hours **BREAK**

15.30–17.00 hours

Thinking about the social sciences: developing a shared vocabulary

- Questions from attendees. What do we need to know from the social sciences?
- Open discussion of the poster presentations and concepts from the morning session intended to create a shared vocabulary, ensure that the burning questions are framed for the following day and challenge the speakers to bring their scholarship to bear on the role of zoos/aquariums in the contemporary conservation debate

Closing commentary. Peopling the environment: the impact of community engagement and information flow on biologists

19.00 hours **SYMPOSIUM DINNER** – tickets to be booked in advance.

FRIDAY 25 MAY – Draft Programme: WHAT IMPACT DO ZOOS/AQUARIUMS HAVE ON VISITOR CONSERVATION OUTCOMES?

Session 3 – Friday morning: Contributions from Conservation Psychology and links between individual caring and action. Chair: Carol D. Saunders

This session will introduce the new field of conservation psychology in relation to the conservation mission of zoos and aquariums. Two central research areas within conservation psychology address how people care about and value the natural world and how people engage in sustainability behaviors. This session will present recent findings from a national study that addresses these central research areas and offer perspectives from an international group of psychologists about the relationships between connections with animals and engagement in conservation behaviors. Included will be a discussion of the dimensions of nature experiences, aspects of a zoos and aquariums visit that are likely to promote empathy and a sense of connectedness, the link between caring and taking action, and approaches for measuring constructs such as empathy and caring, as well as environmental knowledge, concern, perceptions, values and behaviors. In our discussion, we will draw from this research literature to generate ideas for improving the programs and experiences at zoos and aquariums in order to increase their conservation effectiveness. In addition we will consider various methodologies and approaches for measuring success.

09.00–10.30 hours

Zoos as social-change institutions with a conservation mission

- Introduction to conservation psychology and its relation to zoos/aquariums
- Two likely pathways toward encouraging conservation behavior in zoo/aquarium settings and research needs

What do we know about the impact of zoos/aquariums on conservation knowledge: effects, attitudes and behaviors from a national study in the United States?

- Presentation of the multi-institutional research program

What do we know from psychology about the links between connections with animals and motivations to engage in conservation action?

- Nature experiences as precursors for pro-environmental behavior
- Role of nature experiences in promoting environmental concern and positive attitudes and behaviors toward the environment
- Measuring the impact of zoo and aquarium programs on environmental perceptions and values
- Connectedness, caring and commitment: implications for designing the zoo experience

10.30–10.45 hours **BREAK**

10.45–12.15 hours

Commentary. The importance of animal and nature experiences for promoting empathy, moral development and conservation behaviors

Panel discussion and open discussion

12.15–13.30 hours **LUNCH**

Session 4 – Friday afternoon: How social processes and concepts of community influence environmental action. Chair: Tom Webler

The last session will explore the societal dimensions of how zoos and aquaria can promote environmental action on the part of individuals and institutions. First, the speakers will examine how societal beliefs about environmental ethics develop, including consideration of whether there is a logical progression of how societies learn about how to interact with nature? Based on this consideration, the presenters will explore what roles are available to zoos and aquaria in this social learning process? Second, the speakers will examine how meanings are created and changed in the societal discourse about nature and environment. Concepts such as “wilderness”, “biodiversity”, and “natural” are core building blocks for this discussion. Finally, the session will explore what zoos and aquaria can do differently if they are aware of the key points where political and ideological battles are fought over the meanings of terms? This session will conclude with an open discussion of key findings from the symposium.

13.30–14.50 hours

The development of societal beliefs and cultural transformation

- Overview of sociological theory and the building blocks for thinking about social-change activism in zoos and aquariums

The evolution of environmental discourse. What happens when individuals start to change their narratives about nature-protection behaviors? What roles can zoos and aquariums play?

- An anthropologist’s view of how zoos and aquariums can rethink their role in social change
- An assessment of assets available to zoos and aquariums that can be used to foster social change

The importance of language, re-modeling nature as valued, and the role of zoos and aquariums

14.50–15.15 hours **BREAK**

15.15–17.00 hours

Commentary

- What are the possibilities of ethical tensions at zoos that can be informative/provocative?
- How do these theories inform the understanding of the role zoos and aquariums can play in the conservation movement?

Open discussion

Final summary