

ZOOS, RESERVES AND SANCTUARIES

Many believe zoos should be banned and, certainly, the role of the zoo and the whole ethos of keeping animals in captivity is a crucial element in the issue of animal well-being. Studies show that animals kept in captivity in unnatural surroundings can undergo severe behavioural disturbance, causing great distress. With changing human attitudes this has become a major concern. Increasingly, animals are being seen not as soulless beasts to be exploited, but as creatures of worth having their own right to life and to express their essential qualities and characteristics.

The image of the cruelly frustrated lion or tiger pacing back and forth across a tiny concrete floor is one that more and more people are finding distressing, to say nothing of the experience of the animal itself. Not all zoos present this image, but many do, and the existence of the latter is certainly unacceptable.

Others believe that zoos should remain, controlled through strict licensing laws with a strong emphasis on animal well-being and a greater educational role. There is also a strong argument for zoos as places for breeding and, in this, there have been some notable successes.

The issue of animals in captivity evokes strong feelings, and rightly so. Perhaps what is needed is a balance between three major requirements:

1. The need to ensure that animals are provided with natural habitats that encourage and enhance their own unique qualities and instincts,
2. The need to provide adequate facilities to cater for the temporary breeding of endangered species prior to re-introduction into the wild,
3. The need to cultivate a more sensitive and informed attitude among people towards the animal world without unnecessary intrusion into the animals' natural habitat to achieve this.

Zoo-Check

Organisations have been founded to monitor the well-being of captive wildlife. Zoo-Check, which has independent organisations active in Canada, the USA and the UK, focuses in particular upon checking and preventing all types of abuse to captive animals and wildlife. Amongst its aims are the phasing out of zoos and the encouragement of the conservation that will enable wildlife to be kept in its natural habitat. Zoo-Check is also involved in Elefriends — the elephant protection group. The devastating effect of the ivory trade, as well as big game hunting and habitat loss, has meant that in the last decade African elephant numbers have fallen from 1.3 million to less than 600,000 in the wild. Currently over 80,000 are slaughtered each year. "In addition to working for a complete ban on ivory trading Elefriends is co-ordinating an international consumer awareness campaign to raise awareness of the plight of the African elephant and to urge the public not to buy ivory."

World Wide Fund for Nature

Best known of the organisations concerned with animal well-being is the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF — formerly the World Wildlife Fund). Founded in 1961, the WWF today consists of WWF International, based in Switzerland, and 23 WWF national organisations. In recent years WWF has focused primarily upon endangered species, for instance its work with the giant panda in China (whose image provides the symbol of WWF), and the Project Tiger initiative in India. Whilst remaining actively involved in a wide variety of projects around the world, WWF is also taking on a greater lobbying role, as well as continuing to encourage a more informed and enlightened public awareness of the natural world. It is inspiring to note how much time and effort WWF is putting into educational projects. Considerable energy is also put into preparing educational packs for use in schools around the world.

WWF's work has now expanded into conservation of the natural world, maintaining pressure to ensure the continued existence of many threatened natural habitats needed by indigenous wildlife. This is well illustrated by WWF's work on the island of Tiritiri Matangi, New Zealand. Here a forest has been replanted and several species of endangered birds have been reintroduced and are thriving. The whole island has now been declared an open sanctuary.

Reserves and sanctuaries

The creation of reserves and sanctuaries is a much needed step along the path of wildlife conservation. Natural, safe environments for both indigenous and migrating wildlife are desperately needed. It is important that such environments should be regarded as the preserve of wildlife. Wildlife must be allowed to 'be itself' without human interference.

Where environments are artificially created and managed, over-protection can lead to species becoming over populous and culling may become necessary. When humankind intrudes on nature, or seeks to take on nature's role, it involves taking responsibility for accepting *all* of nature's processes. Are we willing to take on this responsibility?

Can we really manage wildlife in the natural world, or is this a contradiction? What role do zoos and reserves have, and how can they most effectively meet the needs of wildlife? Zoos are not the final answer and reserves and sanctuaries are simply necessities that have been brought on by humanity's wanton destruction of wildlife and the natural world. These issues are drawing enlightened thought from people of concern working in the field of animal welfare. In the final analysis, the whole problem stems from the human anthropocentrism which concerned people are now moving away from. The solution lies in a change of attitude. Recognition of an animal's right to life, as part of the evolutionary process on earth, must be encouraged, together with respect and reverence towards all wildlife.

There is not an animal on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you.
The Qur'an