**Should Animals Be Kept in Zoos?**



*Sean MacEntee / Flickr*

By [**SENCER**](https://ww2.kqed.org/learning/author/sencer/) MAY 11, 2016

*This post is part of KQED’s*[*Do Now U*](http://ww2.kqed.org/learning/tag/do-now-u/)*project. Do Now U is a weekly activity for students and the public to engage and respond to current issues using social media. Do Now U aims to build civic engagement and digital literacy for learners of all ages. This post was written by Sophia Buscher and Victoria Staudenraus, students at*[*St. Mary’s College of California*](https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/)*, in partnership with the*[*Lindsay Wildlife Experience*](http://lindsaywildlife.org/)*.*

**Learn More about Animals in Zoos**

Although wild animals have been held captive for thousands of years, the first modern zoo opened in 1763 in Paris, France. As people became more interested in science and natural history, zoos served as a way to display and study animals. Today, zoos provide opportunities for public education and entertainment, as well as scientific research and conservation. There are about [2,800](https://www.aza.org/what-is-accreditation/) licensed [animal exhibitors](https://www.aphis.usda.gov/publications/animal_welfare/content/printable_version/fs_anexhit.pdf)throughout the U.S., which include zoos, circuses, petting farms, wildlife and marine mammal parks, and some sanctuaries. Out of these, [233 are accredited](https://www.aza.org/current-accreditation-list/) by the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](https://www.aza.org/) (AZA). The AZA “[holds animal exhibitors to high standards of animal care, science and conservation](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/11/1113_031113_zoorole.html)” in the United States and all over the world. Even though many animal exhibitors are still considered zoos, they have not met the requirements of the AZA and, therefore, have not been accredited.

Proponents of zoos point to the fact that they educate the general public, are beneficial for scientific research, and work toward conservation efforts and captive breeding. At the San Francisco Zoo, there are educational programs for children ages 1-17. From camps, to mobile programs that bring smaller animals to schools, to family activities that look at local wildlife near the zoo, the public is able to get hands-on education about animals they may not be able to meet and learn about otherwise. The [Lindsay Wildlife Experience](http://lindsaywildlife.org/) in Walnut Creek, California, offers similar experiences to connect locals with wildlife and educate people on how they can do small things to help benefit wildlife in urban areas. Zoos can also be beneficial for scientific research. Studies are sometimes better able to be completed in zoos because of the controlled environment of a zoo. Lastly, zoos help endangered populations by using [captive breeding](https://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/endangeredspecies/capbreedpops/default.cfm) and release. The AZA’s [Species Survival Plan Program](https://www.aza.org/species-survival-plan-program/) is a long-term plan that incorporates conservation breeding, preservation of habitat, education and research to support the survival of threatened and endangered species. Many zoos also work on [local conservation efforts](http://www.sfzoo.org/conservation/local-conservation-efforts.htm) to maintain local wildlife populations.

On the other hand, many would say that wild animals should not be held in captivity. It has been argued that captive breeding isn’t always effective, zoos do not provide natural habitats, and that zoos put unnecessary stress on animals. Some studies have shown that reintroduced animals have [high mortality rates](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2008/01/080123-carnivores-wild.html) because they are poorly adapted and lack the skills needed to survive in the wild. Since an animal’s well-being is dependent on their environment, some contend that zoos do not provide healthy habitats for animals. Enclosures–even when designed to mimic an animal’s natural habitat–are still not really natural. And, zoos can’t really provide the space that large or wide-ranging animals, like elephants, are used to. Due in part to unnatural enclosures, animals in zoos are [under stress](http://news.discovery.com/animals/zoo-animals/chimpanzee-mental-illness-zoos-110705.htm). Animals are often bored and, as a result, some become aggressive and can lash out at other animals or zookeepers. In [a study](http://news.discovery.com/animals/zoo-animals/chimpanzee-mental-illness-zoos-110705.htm) done on 40 chimpanzees in six different zoos, all of the chimps exhibited behavior their counterparts in nature did not. Some of these behaviors included rocking back and forth, tearing out their hair, self-mutilation, and the drinking of their urine. This behavior is not seen in their wild counterparts suggesting that being in the zoo is causing these chimps to develop mental illness due to stress.

What do you think? Should animals be kept in zoos? Why or why not?

https://ww2.kqed.org/learning/2016/05/11/should-animals-be-kept-in-zoos/