

Zoos and Conservation Policy



“Zoos are based on the menageries of old and hearken back to a time when Europeans used to pillage other continents and steal their treasures. Zookeepers today must recognise that their business model is dying and stop pretending that zoos make meaningful contributions to conservation. They should be at the forefront of the movement to target the root causes of extinction and the endangerment of animals all over the world: habitat destruction, poaching and the exotic-animal trade.”

Sonul Badiani-Hammett, PETA Campaigns Assistant - on the views of the PETA Foundation

Background and Key Tenets of Argument

Since the opening of London Zoo in 1828 (ZSL, 2016), zoos have been perceived as an integral aspect of British culture, supposedly contributing to both scientific endeavour and education.

According to the 1981 Zoo Licensing Act, a zoo is ‘defined as any establishment where animals of wild species are exhibited to the public’ (DEFRA, 2012).

This demonstrates that even by government standards, the primary purpose of a zoo is related to its engagement with the public and not necessarily to its conservation purposes. Exhibition does not necessarily entail education.

We are arguing that zoos exist primarily for the amusement and entertainment of the public, and only secondarily for their contributions to science and education.

Animal welfare and conservation efforts have only been a recent trend (Seddon, Armstrong, Maloney, 2007).

When first introduced, London Zoo existed at a time when animals were used predominantly for for entertainment and sensory experience, often in unethical ways (Plumb, 2010). London Zoo served as a contrast because its scientific framework gave it an element of respectability, but it still followed on from this menagerie tradition.

We now live in a much more ethically engaged society where there is no place for zoological parks as tourist attractions or entertainment sites. They currently exist as such and so have a highly anthropocentric focus (Fennell, 2014). Zoos have been framing themselves as institutes of conservation (Evidence Box 1).

Overview

- Zoos as they currently exist do not make as meaningful a contribution to conservation work as they profess to do.
- Findings from the EU Zoo inquiry of 2011 support this.
- Zoos already have much of the framework to conduct effective conservation work.
- We propose to repurpose existing zoos and wildlife centres listed as zoos by Biaza as either Large Scale Conservation Centres (LSCCs) or Small Scale Conservation Centres (SSCCs).
- Zoos and aquaria not fit to be repurposed will be shut down.
- With extended international efforts, Britain will establish itself as a leader and example in conservation work while contributing to the global effort.
- We propose a shift in the collective mindset of animals being there for us, to us being there for the animals.

Indeed, there is a general perception of them as ‘arks’ of preserving biodiversity while species populations decline in the wild, but zoologists have found that in situ conservation is more effective than the ex situ breeding programs of zoos (Balmford et al, 1995).

These ineffective captive breeding programmes of zoos are worsened by the fact that much of what they profess to be doing doesn’t match up with what they actually do (Evidence Box 2).

We believe conservation and ethical, useful research are the only legitimate grounds to preserve any aspect of zoo-type institutions but current conservation efforts are inadequate.

Thus our proposal is to dismantle them as they currently exist and repurpose them according our proposed criteria.

Box 1 -

Example Conservation Agendas of Various UK Zoos.

ZSL:

'The advancement of zoology by, among other things, the conducting of scientific research, the promoting of conservation of biological diversity and the welfare of animals, the care for and breeding of endangered and other species, the fostering of public interest, the improvement and dissemination of zoological knowledge and participation in conservation worldwide.' (ZSL Conservation Review, 2015)

Bristol Zoo:

'Bristol Zoological Society is a conservation and education charity, which runs and operates Bristol Zoo Gardens and the Wild Place Project. We save wildlife together, through conservation science research, working to protect species and habitats overseas, encouraging sustainable behaviours and perceptions, educating tomorrow's wildlife warriors and giving families a great day out. Our conservation science efforts are worldwide...' (Bristol Zoo, 2016)

Chester Zoo:

'Wildlife conservation is at the heart of everything we do. We use scientific evidence to help identify and address many of the challenges our natural world faces.' (Chester Zoo, 2016)

Education not Exhibition:

"I believe that generally zoos are there to be entertaining and are not educational facilities in and of themselves. Just because you have seen the animal and learnt some generic facts from a signpost next to it, doesn't mean that you get to have a full appreciation for how that animal would behave in its natural habitat, what threatens it, and how it would normally fit into its natural ecosystem. I believe there should be more of an emphasis on understanding animals in their natural habitat as opposed to just watching them in an enclosure, even if, especially if, that enclosure is a more comfortable environment than what they would experience otherwise." **Catriona Millar, BSc in Zoology from Newcastle University**

Box 2 -

Findings from 2011 EU Zoo Inquiry (ENDCAP for Born Free Foundation, 2012) - 25 zoos investigated

Few real numbers of endangered or threatened animals relative to animals not needing to be conserved:

- 17% of all species observed were threatened.
- 3.41% were classified as Critically Endangered.
- 0.37% were classified as Extinct in the Wild.

Inadequate compliance with species management programmes:

- Less than half of all threatened species observed were involved in European Endangered species Programmes (EEPs) or the European StudBook programmes (ESBs).
- 12 of the 25 zoos did not take part at all in a European Species Management Programme.

Minimal research efforts:

- 60% of the zoos investigated were not partaking in scientific research regarding the welfare and longevity of wild animals.

Unresponsive about conservation efforts:

- 5 out of 25 zoos completed and returned the Standard Zoo Questionnaire.

Not all zoos fulfilling their educational role:

- Only 20 out of 25 of the zoos had an educational strategy in place.
- 15% of species holdings lacked information regarding the species.
- 72% of signs and available information on species information regarding conservation.

Our end-goal - full conversion of zoos and aquaria into:

1. **Large-scale conservation centre** with international as well as regional efforts, with a strong focus on conducting scientific research for the betterment of conservation efforts.
2. **Small-scale conservation centre** with a regional focus, and resources geared towards the preservation of a small selection of animals, rehabilitation of those animals if required, in-situ conservation through habitat maintenance and upkeep. These will have the ultimate aim of reintroducing animals into their natural habitat.

Large Scale Conservation Centres

The selected establishments will be converted into LSCCs which put the protection of habitats and species at the forefront of their agendas through national and international collaborative efforts.

There will be a degree of continuity by taking the best of their conservation practices that are already in effect and enhancing these.

There will also be further improvement by re-modelling them after examples set by large conservation organisations, specifically the WWF.

Crucially, the changes brought in will effect a paradigm shift in the mind of the public: *we propose a shift from the animals being there for us to us being there for the animals.*

The Selected Seven :

- ZSL London Zoo
- ZSL Whipsnade Zoo
- Bristol Zoo
- Chester Zoo
- Edinburgh Zoo
- Dublin Zoo
- The National Marine Aquarium

Criteria for selection:

Size: either high numbers of visitors or a large cultural impact relative to its local area.

Conservation efforts: those already in effect must be wide-ranging in scope, both in-situ and ex-situ, both national and international.

Transparency: detailed reports or evidence of their conservation efforts already in place. This is mainly a practical as well as ethical criteria. In order to know what can be improved upon and what needs to be introduced, it is essential to have an idea of the programs and practices which are already in place.

Research efforts: the zoo must already have a strong, ethical, and useful research policy in place.

Box 3 -

Evidence of 'Selected Seven' meeting criteria.

[NB: the listing of evidence in this case is not to support what the zoo is already doing, but to demonstrate that it is malleable to the changes we propose.]

ZSL London and Whipsnade Zoos

Size: according to the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, in 2015, ZSL London zoo had 1,265,911 in total visits, making it the second most visited zoo, and ZSL Whipsnade zoo had 736,900.

Conservation: ZSL London zoo collaborates nationally and internationally with universities and conservation organisations e.g. the United for Wildlife scheme and the Marine Reserves Coalition (ZSL Conservation Review, 2015).

Transparency: Issuing of annual conservation reviews, annual report and accounts lends itself to a strong degree of transparency in their practices. These can be accessed via the website.

Research: ZSL has its own Institute of Zoology which conducts research into behavioural and population ecology; biodiversity and macroecology; evolution and molecular ecology; people, wildlife and ecosystems; wildlife epidemiology. We respect the value of this contribution to society, and so would suggest that the Institute of Zoology be preserved as an entity in its own right and recommend that other such institutes are established in association with the other LSCCs.

Bristol Zoo

Size: according to its annual review, in 2015, Bristol zoo had 593,385 in total visits.

Conservation: it is involved in both in-situ and ex-situ conservation, and national and international projects, in countries including Madagascar, China, Cameroon and South Africa.

Transparency: similarly to London zoo, Bristol zoo issues an annual conservation report which allows for a more transparent assessment of its efforts.

Research: Bristol Zoological Society Conservation Science Department has multiple projects, centred around conservation of species and habitats, in the UK and abroad.

Chester Zoo

Size: the most visited zoo in the UK, the 12th most visited site in the UK (ALVA, 2015).

Conservation: projects in Asia, South America and Africa. Recipient of two silver awards from BIAZA, one for Animal Breeding, Care and Welfare, and the other for Conservation (Chester Zoo Annual Report, 2015).

Transparency: issue an annual report as well as scientific reports and review. There is no annual conservation report, but disparate elements of their conservation agenda are evident in these other documents.

Research: conduct 'biodiversity surveys and ecological monitoring' in order to 'help define areas and species of most conservation value and need' (Conservation and Science at Chester Zoo, 2015).

Edinburgh Zoo

Size: most visited zoo in Scotland with 633,351 total visits in 2015. The 54th most visited site in the UK in 2015 (ALVA, 2015).

Conservation: purport to have several areas of conservation work including: field work, species restoration and applied conservation genetics.

Transparency: no annual conservation report, but as part of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, it is possible to access information bearing on their projects online.

Research: under the umbrella of the RZSS, there are a number of research projects including: RZSS field work projects; species restoration; applied conservation genetics.

Dublin Zoo

Size: while the size and influence of Dublin zoo is perhaps less than that of its English and Scottish counterparts, it has primarily been included here as having a strong cultural impact on *Irish* conservation.

Conservation: international as well as Irish conservation efforts, including the EAZA Ape campaign of 2011.

Transparency: no annual conservation report, but information accessible on their website.

Research: not as extensive as ZSL or the RZSS but still occurs in the forms of team studies, volunteer studies, third-level student projects and multi-zoo studies.

The National Marine Aquarium

Size: largest public aquarium in the UK. 300,000 visitors per year.

Conservation: particular focus on marine conservation, mainly through education.

Transparency: on their website, there is an acknowledgement that *'rather than delivering the in-situ conservation that other organisations are better placed to deliver, we've aspired to place ourselves as leaders in the engagement and education fields of marine conservation.'*

Research: conducted over 120 projects since opening in 1998.

How will LSCCs differ from zoos as they are today?

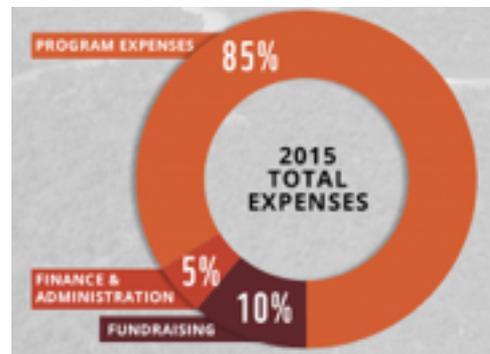
Funding: regardless of how they are currently sponsored, all LSCCs will be entirely government funded.

Animals: there will be animals, but not on display. There should be no animals kept that are not in need of conservation aid i.e. no non-endangered species. There must be a legitimate purpose for the animals presence e.g. researching behaviour, building gene banks, ex-situ breeding programmes. Each LSCC should focus in on a select number of species and employ scientists and specialists whose field pertains to that species.

Enclosures: these will be more spacious and/or a greater approximation to their natural habitat. There will be no theatrical or anthropocentric displays.

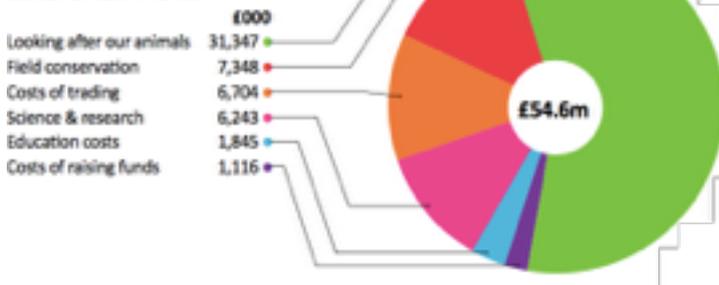
Visitation: visits to the education centres will be free. These may take place during an established set of hours (e.g. 9 AM until 5 PM) during the week. Visits to see the animals must be preplanned and must occur in the framework of an educational experience (e.g. accompanied by lectures). These will also be free.

Education: this will not centre around exhibition of the animals first and foremost. There may be lectures, classroom-type activities, interactive exhibits, videos and games and anything else with an ecological or conservation agenda.



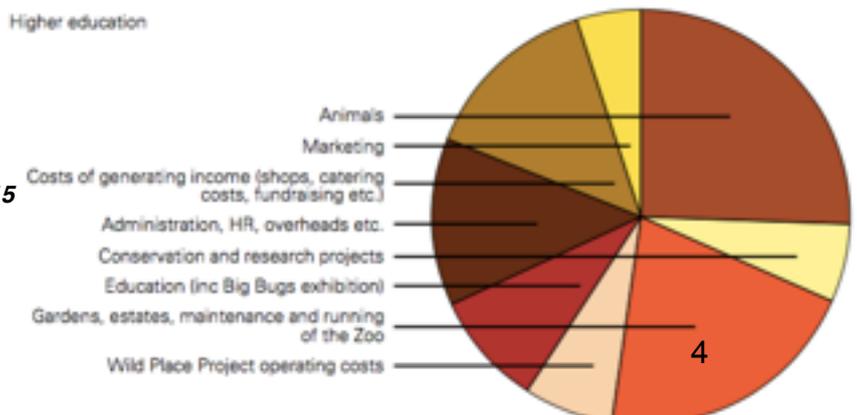
WWF's annual expenditure on conservation (WWF annual report, 2015).

2015 – WHAT OUR MONEY WAS SPENT ON:



London Zoo's expenditure on conservation in 2015 [13.5%] (ZSL Conservation Review, 2015).

Bristol Zoos's expenditure on conservation in 2015 [15%] (Bristol Zoo Conservation Review, 2015).



Case Study Organisation - WWF

As far as is possible, LSCCs will be modelled after the WWF. The WWF will serve as an index against which the network of LSCCs will be measured. The WWF has one physical centre in Britain, but most of its projects are run in-situ; the LSCCs will each constitute one individual physical centre.

It propounds a holistic approach to conservation, focusing in on: 'food, climate, fresh water, wildlife, fresh water and oceans'.

While research programmes and *some* ex-situ conservation work will be conducted at the actual sites of the seven LSCCs, the main body of work will be conducted with this holistic approach i.e. working to improve the environment, attitudes to ecology and educating on sustainable living.

LSCCs physical building conversion:

(model them after the Living Planet Centre of the WWF)

- repurpose the actual buildings to be more eco-friendly e.g. instal solar panels; send 0% of waste to landfill by recycling, composting and using the remainder in energy recovery; collect rainwater to flush toilets and water the plants.
- plant more trees and foliage around the grounds.
- convert animal enclosures that are no longer being used into exhibition spaces (educating on animals, the environment, conservation practices) or into small garden spaces, which may be used to establish educational gardening projects involving children from the local schools.
- free to visit.
- spaces available for conferences and meetings. Free to book if the conferences and meetings relate to conservation or the environment. If not, then they must be rented at a fee. That money will go directly towards conservation products.
- expanding animal enclosures and making them a more accurate approximation to an animal's natural habitat.



Timescale of Policy Implementation

By 2017:

- Cease all entertainment aspects of the 'Selected Seven'. This includes but is not limited to 'animal experiences' i.e. direct interaction with the animals, late night events (e.g. silent discos), alcohol consumption on the premises, animals demonstrations (e.g. Edinburgh Zoo's penguin walk).
- Ensure that all food and drink sold on the premises is sustainably sourced, preferably locally if possible.
- Any commercial products sold (i.e. gift shop wares) must be environmentally friendly.
- All profits must go towards conservation work.

By 2020:

- Ceasing of culling and breeding programmes.
- Only pre-organised visits to see animals will be permitted.
- Visits to educational facilities will be allowed during a defined time period.
- Ticketed entry will not be applied to either of these.
- Begin sourcing locations to build government funded sanctuaries for the animals once they have left the zoos.

By 2023:

- Begin construction of sanctuaries.

By 2025:

- Shut down/conversion of zoos/aquaria that are not a part of the 'selected seven'.
- Non-endangered animals should either be released into their natural habitats if feasible, or sent to a suitable sanctuary.
- Endangered animals should be sent to LSCCs or to SSCCs (Small-Scale Conservation Centres) depending on the type of animal involved.
- Buildings and grounds of all zoos will be taken into acquisition by the government. The government will reimburse the owners an amount deemed to be appropriate by objective assessment.

By 2027:

- Convert the buildings and grounds into research facilities, animal sanctuaries, schools or anything which contributes to ecological or educational government agendas (i.e. not strictly animal-related). They may *not* be sold on into the private sector.

By 2030:

- Minimise number of ex-situ conservation programmes. This is a multi-faceted requirement. Assess and collate data on which animals can be successfully bred ex-situ. Only for those species may ex-situ breeding remain in practice, and only then as part of a much larger conservation effort.
- Increase number of in-situ conservation programmes, largely through the conservation of habitats both within and outside of Britain.
- Establish rehabilitation programmes for animals both in the UK and outside of the UK to help return animals to the wild once their habitats have been secured, protected and maintained.

Sanctuaries and Rehabilitation Facilities - Example Organisations

Sanctuaries: Unfortunately, many animals will not be able to return to their natural habitat - both endangered and non-endangered animals. This may be due to a lack of feasible habitat. This may be because their behaviours and morphology have adapted to their enclosed space. Consequently, the UK government should fund exotic animal sanctuaries using the model of PAWS in America.

"No true sanctuary should be involved in breeding or commercial exploitation of the animals in its care. PAWS' animals are not bred, traded, sold, rented or forced to perform. With the exception of a limited number of planned educational and fundraising events held annually, PAWS' facilities are not open to the public." (PAWS, 2016)

Rehabilitation Facilities: When there are secured, protected and maintained habitats established, those animals that are born into sanctuaries or are rescued and for whom it is feasible (i.e. they demonstrate sufficiently adaptive tendencies) may be gradually rehabilitated into a life in their natural habitat, the UK government should establish such facilities both nationally and internationally. These will be modelled after the Ketapang Orangutan Rescue Centre in Indonesia.

"In 2010, 24 hectares of land was purchased in Ketapang, West Kalimantan to build an Orangutan rescue and rehabilitation centre for orangutans that had lost their forest habitat in the province of West Kalimantan. The aim is to rehabilitate the rescued orangutans and release them into protected areas of forest." (The Orangutan Project, 2016)

Small Scale Conservation Centres

Following centres (trusts, foundations, parks etc.) listed as zoos by Biaza - suitable for conversion to SSCCs:

[Note: this is a list of centres which are already suited for conversion to an SSCC. Some are more suitable than others. This list is not exhaustive. Any similar centre which adheres to the legislation policies may be licensed as a SSCC.]

1. Becky Falls Woodland Park
2. **Chestnut Centre**
3. Durrell Wildlife Park
4. Galloway Wildlife Conservation Park
5. Hawk Conservancy Trust
6. Kirkleatham Owl Centre
7. The Mablethorpe Seal Sanctuary and Wildlife Centre
8. Marwell Wildlife
9. New Forest Wildlife Park
10. Pensthorpe
11. The Raptor Foundation
12. Shepreth Wildlife Park
13. The Scottish Deer Centre
14. Tilgate Nature Centre
15. Wildlife Heritage Foundation, the Big Cat Sanctuary
16. Wildwood Trust
17. World Owl Trust
18. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trusts (9 Centres)
19. **The UK Wolf Conservation Trust**

The Chestnut Centre and The UK Wolf Conservation Trust have served as primary case studies from which the policies have been derived.

Legislation:

1. Demonstrations involving animals (e.g. flying displays for birds of prey, advertised feeding times) are not permitted.
2. 'Animal experiences' - i.e. direct interaction with the animals by members of the public, will no longer be permitted.
3. Observation of the animals is permitted, but should not dictate the way that the conservation centres are run (e.g. at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust all visits must be pre-booked).
4. Only the keeping of endangered or threatened species shall be permitted. Animals that are not in need of conservation aid do not need to be kept in these conservation establishments.
5. Small conservation centres should focus their efforts on a select number of species (e.g. the Chestnut Centre focuses on otters and owls).
6. All small conservation centres should lead or take part in existing in-situ conservation programs within the local region.
7. Ideally, animals should not be kept in enclosures but in an environment which is as minimally restrictive as possible and they should be kept always with the teleological aim of getting them in an environment as close to their natural habitat as possible, or in their natural habitat itself.
8. There should be active efforts to maintain the natural habitats of the animals that have been released as an indirect means of supporting the animal.
9. All small conservation centres should have in-house veterinarians who have skills specific to the animals in which the centre specialises.

Potential Criticisms and Our Response

We have identified six main areas of criticism and have responded to them within our capabilities. However, we make no claims that all criticism will be limited to these six areas.

These are:

1. Education
2. Entertainment
3. The Aquariums
4. Tourism
5. Logistical difficulties
6. Economic impact

Education

Critics may postulate that by limiting access to LSCCs and SSCCs and only focusing on animals which are endangered, this will limit people's exposure to animals and conservation.

Response: in their current form, zoos have a much stronger *entertainment* angle than educational angle. It will still be possible to visit LSCCs and SSCCs. These visits will be prearranged, non-ticketed, and have a very clear focus on conservation agendas. By not costing anything, there will be no socioeconomic restraints.

“Zoological museums are capable of taking up the slack of zoos in terms of education and animal exposure alongside other resources. Also, the animals in zoos aren't necessarily representative of animals in the wild, as being kept in captivity can alter an animal's morphology and behaviour. Diet, for example, can impact the structure of an animal's jaw.”

Jack Ashby, Grant Museum of Zoology Manager

Entertainment

Critics may postulate that zoo experiences are a legitimate form of entertainment and help with family bonding and improving people's mental health.

Response: whilst we acknowledge the cultural value of zoos and their histories, there are other forms of entertainment and family bonding which are available.

The Aquariums

Critics may postulate that we are being unduly biased towards zoos.

Response: Aquariums have a much smaller in-situ conservation agenda in comparison with zoos. Our primary purpose is to create highly focused centres of conservation from existing infrastructure.

Tourism

Critics may postulate that zoos comprise a major aspect of Britain's tourism industry.

Response: there are other tourist attractions to fill the vacuum left by zoos (e.g. botanical gardens, zoological museums). Further to that, no British zoos feature in the top ten most visited sites of 2015.

Logistical difficulties

Critics may postulate that it is too difficult to shut down or convert zoos and aquaria into the centres which we have recommended. Also, relocating animals may be difficult to do without impacting their welfare.

Response: we would draw a parallel here with the NHS. The foundation of the NHS required conversion of existing infrastructure and prioritising of public interests above private agendas. Similarly, we are proposing for a public conservation interest to trump private agendas. Relocation of animals will be done over as minimal distances as is possible, using the most comfortable means of transportation for them. Ultimately, their relocation is being done to improve their *long-term* welfare and the welfare of their species as a whole.

Economic Impact

Critics may postulate that shutting down zoos and the acquiring of privately owned structures by the government will have a negative economic impact.

Response: long-term, a focus on sustainability and conservation will *benefit* the UK government. In the short-term, the government must place a ecological agenda above its economic agenda.

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