



ZOOS AND SAFARI PARKS - HAVE THEY GOT A FUTURE?



Animal Concern has a clear policy on zoos and safari parks. We do not want all zoos closed but we do want their reason for existing to undergo a radical rethink. The days of exhibiting animals for people to ponder are long gone. 99% of people have the perfect zoo in their living room. Television takes us to the natural habitat of animals from the depths of the jungle to the depths of the ocean. We do not have to enslave animals and put them in cages within driving distance of our homes.

Many zoos' justify their existence by breeding endangered species. That's fine - **IF** the animals are given accommodation as near as possible to their natural habitat and **IF** there is a realistic chance of return to the wild. Should it be impossible to meet this criteria then it is better to let a species die out than turn a few individuals into a freak show of living fossils.

Zoos have a long-term future only if they fulfil a useful role. In the 1980's Animal Concern co-operated with two zoos. Edinburgh provided a good home for stump-tailed macaques we rescued from Stirling University and Glasgow constructed an award-winning habitat for black bears we saved from Balloch Bear Park. That is the future for zoos; providing as near natural a sanctuary as feasible for the victims of past human stupidity. Glasgow Zoo also tried to provide a home for several hundred chimps made "redundant" when it was discovered they were of no use in medical research. Sadly the project failed due to lack of funds. They were short of £2 million - probably less than drug companies spend on advertising in the U.K. in a day.

Glasgow Zoo has since become a victim of the lack of public interest in traditional and outdated zoos. Millions of pounds in the red it became little more than a slum. New managers at the Zoo ignored our call to turn the Zoo into an exotic animal sanctuary. In 2003 Glasgow Zoo was forced to close and the owners had to find new homes for the animals.

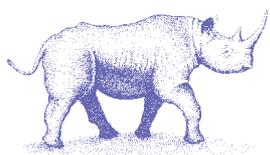
In coming years many more animals will need sanctuary as circuses and zoos close. If large zoos and safari parks specialise in providing tailored sanctuaries for a limited number of species they would justify their own existence. To prepare for such a future it is essential that animals at present in zoos be returned to the wild (if possible) or neutered or put on contraceptives. As exhibited animals die out zoos will gain the space required to create habitats suited to species requiring sanctuary. For instance by allowing other animals to die out naturally the Highland Wildlife Park at Aviemore would have space to create a good habitat for rescued bears.

At the moment zoos all over the world swap animals for breeding programmes. This loose co-ordination, from the Victorian cages in Antwerp Zoo (which thankfully are being upgraded following an Animal Concern investigation and campaign) to the brand new penguin enclosure in Edinburgh, is still based on the idea of having animals (especially cute babies) to attract the paying public. It is time for zoos to stop competing for cash and status. It is time to put the animals first. Zoos which do not change to provide proper sanctuary for animals needing our help, will soon become as extinct as the endangered species they choose to play God with.

In late 2004 we learned of plans by a commercial enterprise to establish a new zoo type attraction at Balloch on the banks of Loch Lomond. We are trying to persuade the company concerned to use available technology to allow the public to see animals in their natural habitat rather than turning living creatures into exhibits in artificial surroundings.

Please help Animal Concern save animals from people who are taking the mentality of the Victorians and their outdated menageries into the 21st century.

Animal Concern has been campaigning for animals since 1876. We receive no state or lottery aid and rely on the public to fund our work. Membership is £100 Life, £10 Waged, £5 Unwaged/Retired, £2 Under Sixteen. Please support our work with a contribution or contact us for a free information pack.



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