

Keeping Animals in the Zoo is not Justifiable

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In recent years, the animal world has come under attack due to two strongly interconnected issues. The global environmental changes have disrupted plant and animal life, forcing entire populations of animals to leave their original habitat in search of new habitats. On the other hand, globalization has disrupted situ conservation of animal habitats, as these animals are constantly on the move (Keulartz, 2015). Consequently, wildlife conservationists are now turning to in situ conservation methods to save endangered species. However, this strategy has sparked a heated debate between wildlife conservationists and animal protectionists. In particular, a debate has come into the limelight of the public, whether wild animals should be conserved in zoos, aquariums, and other sanctuaries. On one hand, some people argue that keeping animals in the zoo hinders their physical and psychological well-being. Others contend that keeping animals enclosed in zoos have certain benefits for both the animal and human kingdom. Yet, others argue that these benefits are relatively small and can be realized through others. Drawing upon the opinions and arguments in favor of keeping animals in zoos versus looking for viable alternatives where animals receive better treatment, indeed, keeping animals in the zoo is not justifiable.

Ideally, zoos are public parks displaying animals for recreational or educational purposes. In ancient times, although animals were collected as antiquities, they were not kept in zoos as in the current sense. Rulers collected animals as a sign of power, which they used to demonstrate their stretch of power. The first modern zoos came into being in the eighteenth century in Vienna, Madrid, and Paris, and in the nineteenth century, London and Berlin followed. In the United States, zoos were only set up in the 1870s (Armstrong & Botzler, 2017). While the ancient rulers kept animals for reasons other than recreational and education, the National

Geographic (n.d.) asserts that animals are kept in zoos today to entertain and educate the public. Animals are also kept in zoos for scientific research and species conservation. However, keeping animals in zoos involves uprooting them from their natural environment, which diminishes their chance of developing behavior typical to their species. This alone borders false advertisement and compromises the educational effect, which is not ethical. Additionally, it affects scientific research since animals are forced to adapt to the new environment, which does not reflect the population in the wild. Besides, keeping animals in zoos compromises animal liberty and poses danger to human life.

Some of the reasons given why animals are kept in zoos include recreation, education, and scientific research purposes. However, changes in animal habitat may interfere with the normal functioning of their biological system. Consequently, animals are less likely to behave as they do in their natural habitat, which means that the observations made and knowledge acquired observing animals in a zoo is not entirely true or reflect the truth. Altering the animal habitat is likely to lead to high-stress levels, subsequently compromising the immune system response and promoting infectious diseases. Carrying scientific research targeting these animals is likely to lead to results that are not entirely true or that do not reflect the true nature of wild animals and their responses to the environment. Armstrong and Botzler (2017) elaborate that it is better to carry out research in large-scale animal preserves. Besides, as Kleiman et al. (2012) elaborate educating the public and conserving species can be conducted in the animals' natural habitat. Additionally, animals in a zoo are forced to adjust and adapt to their new artificial environment, which means that they abandon their free will and live a controlled life. In particular, because animals kept in zoos are restricted in movement and behavior, the kind of recreational experience at the zoo is incomparable to the one in the wild. Still, on recreation, wild animals are

unpredictable and of them have been known to attack their trainers in live shows and circuses. For instance, in 2016, Harambee, a gorilla kept in Cincinnati Zoo attacked a young boy who fell inside the gorilla enclosure (Fieldstadt, 2016). At first, the gorilla did not seem to be attacking the boy but alarmed by the noise around, it moved the boy to another part of the enclosed area. The gorilla was shot in an attempt to rescue the boy. The animal instinct took over, which led to its tragic death. Such an incident is unfortunate for the humans and tragic for the animals who never asked to be put in the zoo in the first place.

Even without considering some of the reasons given for keeping animals in a zoo, there is a moral presumption against conserving animals in a zoo. Ideally, keeping animals in a zoo means taking them from their natural habitat, moving them long distances, and conserving them in foreign environments where their liberty is restricted to the size of the cage. According to Armstrong and Botzler (2017), keeping these animals in captivity restricts them from gathering their food, developing their own social order, and behaving in ways natural to their species. Keeping animals in zoos means they are captive-bred and do not enjoy the freedom experienced by their counterparts in the wild. For instance, a caged bird has interests to fly but due to the size of the cage, it cannot enjoy this activity. It is even more absurd to suggest that because these animals have grown in zoos, they have zero interest in freedom because they have never experienced it. In this case, it would be similar to liken human beings born into slavery do not need freedom. Kleiman et al. (2012) also elaborate that animal rights advocates argue that any form of human behavior that poses harm or fails to meet the needs of animals is intrinsically wrong. Animal needs in this case go beyond providing shelter, sunshine, shade, fresh air, and space for activities. Specifically, these needs must meet the animals' natural desires.

Unfortunately, despite some improvements, the zoos still fail to meet the basic biological and psychological needs of wild animals.

Conclusion

Even if animal conservationists meet the needs of animals in zoos, is it ethical to keep animals in captivity? Is the need to educate the public about the animals or carry out research reason enough to keep animals in zoos? However, all reasons held constant, keeping animals in zoos compromises animal liberty. While the size of the zoo may be big, enough to allow animals some liberty to move to allow and engage in some activities, the zoo is still not their natural habitat, which means that it is limiting. Thus, keeping animals is not only unjustifiable but also ethically wrong. If animal conservationists want to help animals, they should do so in the wild where these animals live in their natural habitat.

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