

Zoos: Pro or Con?

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book

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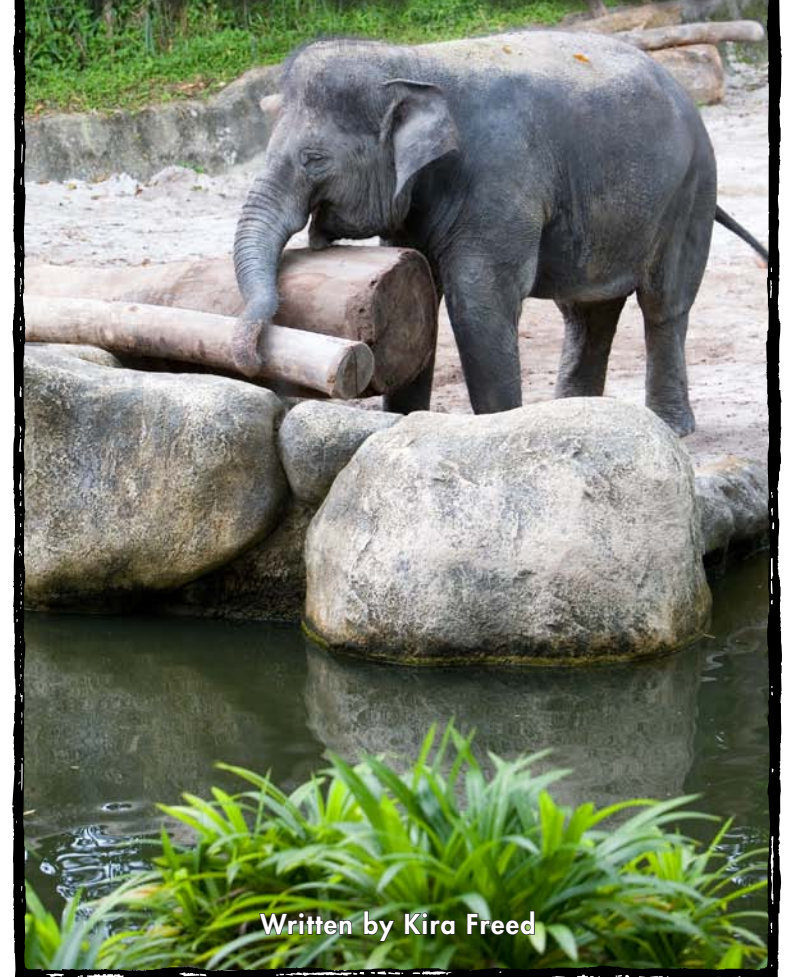


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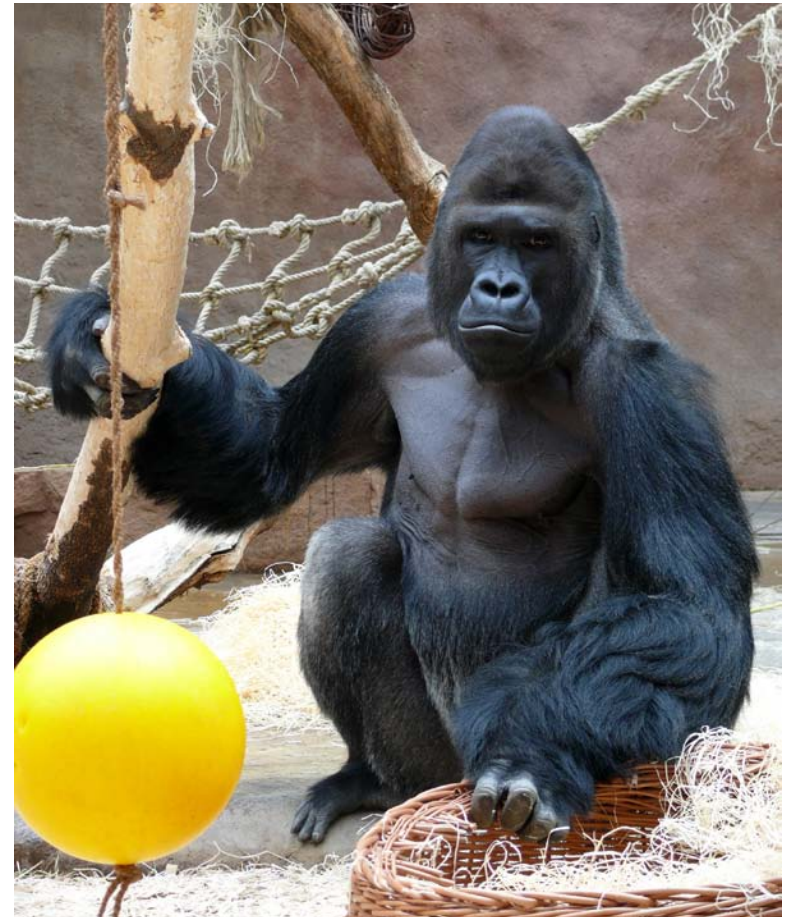
Written by Kira Freed

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Glossary

accredited (<i>adj.</i>)	given approval for meeting a set of standards (p. 9)
conservation (<i>n.</i>)	the protection and preservation of natural resources (p. 4)
controversial (<i>adj.</i>)	causing much disagreement (p. 18)
curator (<i>n.</i>)	a person in charge of an exhibit (p. 15)
ecosystem (<i>n.</i>)	a community of living things together with their habitat (p. 10)
exotic (<i>adj.</i>)	out of the ordinary, usually from a faraway place (p. 11)
extinct (<i>adj.</i>)	completely wiped out (p. 6)
outdated (<i>adj.</i>)	no longer current; out of step with the times (p. 4)
psychological (<i>adj.</i>)	mental and emotional (p. 13)
stewards (<i>n.</i>)	guardians; caretakers (p. 9)
tranquilize (<i>v.</i>)	to give a person or other animal a drug to make him or her calm (p. 16)
wildlife refuges (<i>n.</i>)	areas set aside for the protection and preservation of wild animals (p. 8)

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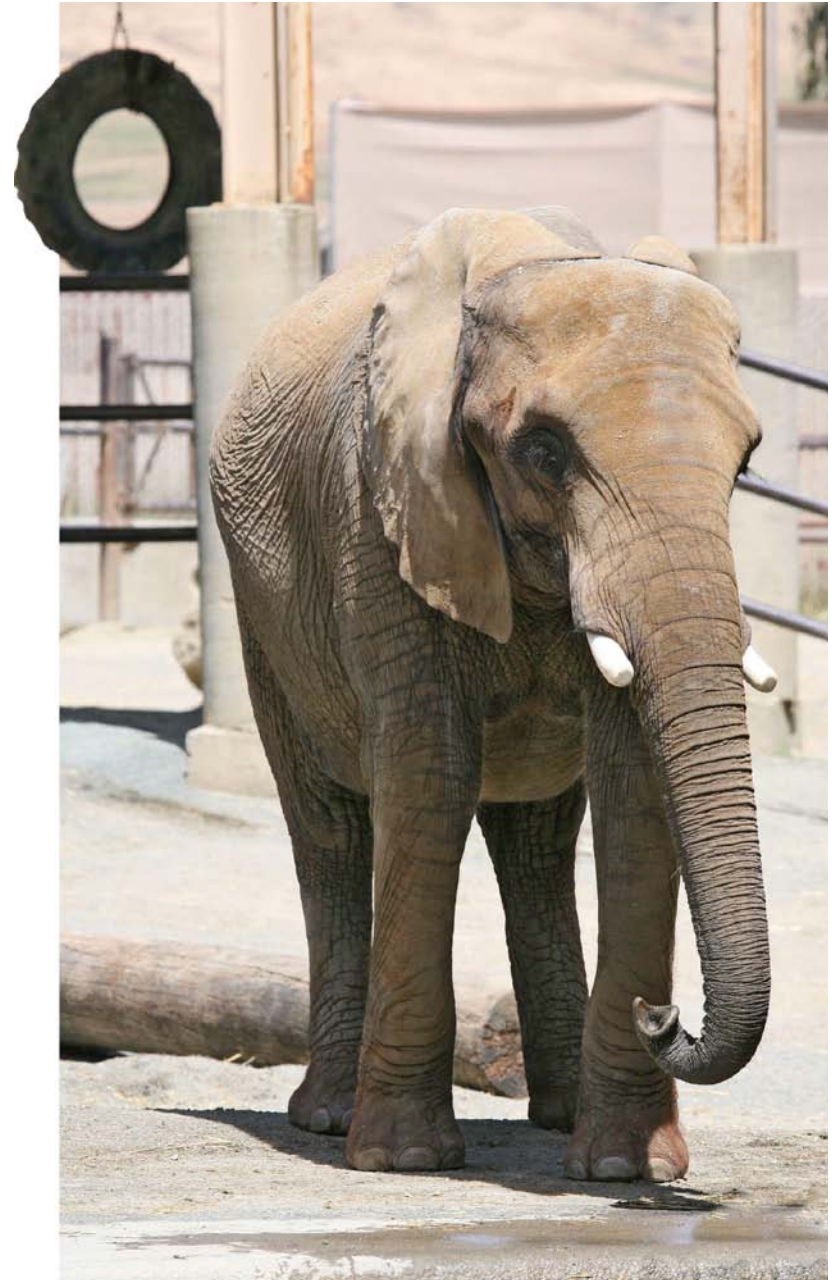
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Some studies have shown that captive elephants live much shorter lives than wild ones.

From the Editor

Now that you've read a selection of readers' opinions, both pro and con, what do *you* think about zoos?

Zoos are a complex, **controversial** topic, and the disagreements about them are not likely to be resolved in the near future. It could be argued that each zoo must be considered individually, since a small, privately owned roadside zoo is quite a bit different from a large city zoo with naturalistic enclosures, captive-breeding programs, and expert biologists.

As you give further thought to zoos, consider the possibility that they might not be able to be labeled as simply good or bad. We invite you to make a list of the goals that you believe every zoo should focus on. Think about how current problems might help zoo professionals learn from mistakes and either improve today's zoos or create better types of zoos in the future.

What do you think are the most important issues for zoos to address?

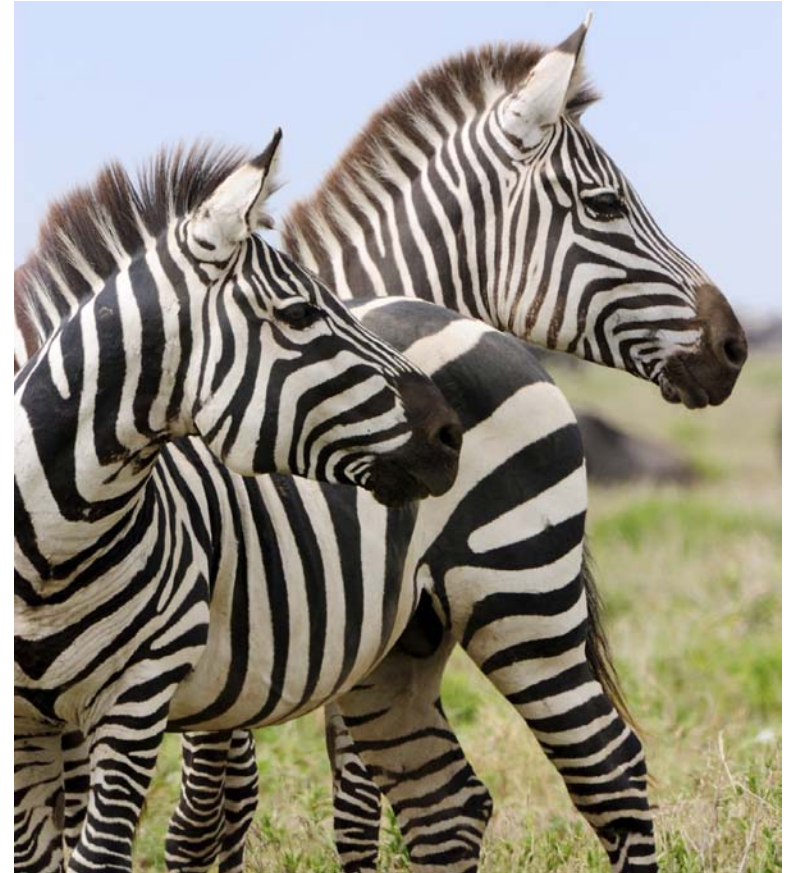


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A Message from Terry Shaw,
Editor of the *Springfield Daily Star*

Many of you read last week that one of our wealthiest residents donated a large sum of money to the local zoo. This money will allow the zoo to grow into one of the leading wildlife **conservation** centers in America.

But news of the funding has sparked a heated debate in our community. Many citizens wrote letters to the newspaper to tell us how they felt about the zoo's expansion. Some of you support the growth of the zoo, while others of you argue that zoos are cruel, **outdated** institutions that should be closed. Many people in the middle like some things about zoos but also recognize that even the best zoos can have problems.

To encourage further discussion on the topic, we are printing a small selection of readers' letters that express many of the pros and cons of zoos. The letters contain both facts and opinions about zoos that may help people decide what is best for our city and what the future should be for the animals that live at our zoo.

When the spaceship lands on their planet, you're placed in a small, barred cage with a bed, a chair, two books, and a large painting of a television on the back wall. Your captors want visitors to their zoo to be able to imagine you in your natural environment. You are fed meat loaf and carrots once a day.

How would you feel if this happened to you? It's no different for the animals we capture and force to live in zoos.



Rhinos are intelligent animals that can quickly become bored in captivity.



Captured by aliens

A letter from Tamyra Green, concerned citizen



Imagine that you're going about your daily life when a spaceship lands nearby, and aggressive aliens with advanced weapons **tranquilize** you. They shove you in a tiny metal crate and transport you back to their home planet. You are permanently separated from your town, neighborhood, parents, and friends.

During the long trip, you're not allowed to move around, and your requests to stretch your legs are ignored. The aliens don't understand a word of your language, and even if they did, they wouldn't be concerned about your needs or desires—only about their wish to have a human for their collection.



This penguin might have more room to swim and play if its zoo was expanded.

Pro: In Support of Zoos

Responsibility to our fellow creatures



A letter from Suzanne McCoy, wildlife biologist

I enthusiastically support the expansion of the Springfield Zoo. In recent decades, people have become more aware of the dangers facing Earth's environment. People are changing the natural world in ways that threaten many animal species. Many kinds of animals that have lived in balance on our planet for millions of years are now in danger of becoming **extinct**. It is up to us to fix the problems we have caused by cleaning up the environment, shifting to "greener" lifestyles, and making every effort to save species whose lives are threatened by our activities.



The combined efforts of the Los Angeles and San Diego Zoos saved the California condor from extinction.

Zoos claim to educate the public, but most visitors spend just a few minutes at each exhibit and tend to view the animals as entertainment. A **curator** at the National Zoo observed the habits of more than seven hundred zoo visitors and concluded that "... officials should stop kidding themselves about the tremendous educational value of showing an animal behind a glass wall." The only way to learn about an animal properly is to view it in its natural habitat.



What would this dolphin say if it were able to talk to these children about living in captivity?



Think About It

A British study found that enclosures in U.K. safari parks and zoos are, on average, one hundred times smaller than the animals' minimum home ranges in the wild. Another study of zoos worldwide revealed that polar bears have one million times less space in captivity than in the wild.

Herd animals that live in large groups in the wild are often kept alone or with just one other member of their species in zoos, and they often lack the exercise needed to keep their bodies healthy. Birds' wings are clipped to prevent them from flying. Aquatic animals have access to a much smaller amount of water than they need.



People's intentional destruction of animal habitats pushes many species beyond their ability to survive.

As people use more wild land for gathering resources and for farming, the natural habitats of animals are broken into smaller, disconnected areas. This process separates animals from others of their kind and makes it more difficult for them to find mates.

My hope is that the Springfield Zoo will join efforts to breed endangered animals. Without zoos, these animals would run the risk of dying out completely in a short time. Zoo professionals work very hard to help these species survive. In some cases, they are even able to return animals born in zoos to the wild.

Many zoos work closely with individuals and organizations in the animals' native regions to establish **wildlife refuges**. They also help educate local people about farming methods that are less damaging to the environment. Some zoos also conduct programs that support keeping wild animals in their native habitats so they don't need to be moved to refuges.

What kind of world do we want to leave to our children and grandchildren? If we want our descendants to experience the incredible variety and beauty of nature, we will need to work to preserve wild animals.

The expansion of the Springfield Zoo will allow our community to take a more active role in spreading the message of conservation. It will also allow our zoo to join efforts to save many species from extinction.

Giant pandas are only one of thousands of species facing possible extinction.



Even when zookeepers want to help, animals can suffer when they are not free. A long-term study of bears and big cats found that these animals are among the most affected by captivity. In the wild, they roam over such large distances that living in small spaces causes them great stress. When kept in zoos, they develop many unnatural behaviors, including pacing, swaying, rolling their heads, and walking in tight circles. Similar repetitive movements have been observed in mentally ill people. Some zoo animals have such serious behavioral problems that they must regularly be given drugs to keep them calm.

The focus of some zoos is on entertaining people, not on meeting the full range of needs of the animals. The life spans of some captive wild animals are shortened, and many of them can develop long-term health problems. For example, captive elephants suffer from a variety of physical conditions, such as arthritis and foot diseases, as well as **psychological** problems.



A zoo worker inspects an elephant's foot for signs of disease.

The conditions in which some zoo animals live are a serious problem. As private businesses, zoos are under pressure to make a profit. As a result, some zoos attempt to reduce their expenses by cutting corners and not giving animals the proper care.

The 2007 escape of a Siberian tiger from its enclosure at the San Francisco Zoo is a case in point. The tiger, likely teased by visitors, climbed a wall, killed one person, and injured two others before being shot. The wall climbed by the tiger was four feet lower than recommended standards, and some workers at the zoo were slow



to respond to the emergency. A tiger and a zoo visitor both lost their lives because the zoo did not follow industry guidelines to ensure the safety of both its animals and visitors.

Tatiana the Siberian tiger was killed after escaping her enclosure at the San Francisco Zoo in 2007.



Educational exhibits can offer rare glimpses into the natural behavior of many species.

Zoos provide priceless education

A letter from Roy Chen, retired teacher



Zoos are important centers of education. Zoos give millions of people the chance to see and appreciate wildlife firsthand. Visitors leave with a greater understanding of the variety of life on Earth, as well as a sense of responsibility as **stewards** of the environment.

In 2007, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) published the results of a three-year study titled “Why Zoos and Aquariums Matter.” This study showed that visiting an AZA-**accredited** zoo or aquarium makes a real difference in the conservation attitudes of visitors. Viewing wildlife face to face in these settings caused more than half of surveyed visitors to want to become more involved in conservation efforts. More than half also reported that their visit gave them a greater sense of connection to nature.

Research has shown that young people need to spend time in nature to develop a sense of values about the environment. Visiting a zoo or aquarium might be the best chance for city dwellers to learn about life outside the world of concrete and steel.

Think About It

More people in North America visit zoos each year than attend all professional sporting events. What does that say about the possibility of educating the public about conservation?

While books and online resources can provide children with facts about animals, there is no substitute for direct experience with the natural world.

As young people learn about the natural world, they understand and respect how a change in

a single element has consequences throughout an **ecosystem**, and how a change in a single ecosystem has consequences for the entire planet. Our planet is in trouble, and we need every one of its citizens to feel a sense of personal responsibility for the well-being of all life forms. Zoos play an important part in helping people develop that sense of responsibility toward the natural world.



Con: Arguments Against Zoos

Zoos send the wrong message

A letter from Jose Gonzales, animal rights activist



As I've followed local discussions on the zoo expansion project, I've become increasingly upset. People have no right to capture wild animals or to lock them in cages. Wild animals have as much right to freedom as humans do. Zoos send a message to the public that keeping wild animals for our own entertainment is acceptable. This sometimes leads people to think they can keep **exotic** animals as pets, even though they lack the training and facilities to care for the animals properly.