

Topic: Importance of Zoos

Speech Type: Claim of Value

Claim: Zoos provide a valuable part for the conservation of animals.

Thesis: In a world where the number of species is constantly decreasing, zoos provide resources and education for the conservation of animals.

Organizational Pattern: comparative advantage pattern

Time: 14 minutes and 50 seconds (14:55)

Zoos Conserve

Introduction

“It seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living.” – (Sir David Attenborough, *State of the Planet*, 2000)

One of the most famous personalities when it comes to conservation and the natural world is David Attenborough. His quote that I just read brings to light how important animals and their environments are to the world. Appealing to the visual importance of this is only the start to getting people to understand the need for conservation. Programs like Planet Earth does this but there are other things need to fully educate people on conservation.

This is where zoos come into play. Looking at Saint Louis Zoo as an example, their mission “is to conserve animals and their habitats through animal management, research, recreation, and educational programs that encourage the support and enrich the experience to the public (“About the Saint Louis Zoo”, 2016).” Tackling conservation from several different angles is something that is special to zoos. There are not many programs that bring the wild to the public while simultaneously conserving the species and educating the public about them.

Even with the help that zoos are providing to saving species, there are people who oppose zoos and similar institutions. They see other options, such as wildlife preserves or full reintroduction of species, to be better than to keeping wild animals in zoos and aquariums. But there are several reasons why these options are not the best and why zoos provide the best conservation of species.

First I will explain why there are oppositions to zoos and the reasons behind these oppositions

Second I will show how zoos provide conservation for species in several different ways.

Third I will explain why zoos are the best option for conservation in our current world and why they should not be shut down.

Transition: So I will begin by describing oppositions to zoos and reasons behind them.

Body

- I. Oppositions: Several reasons why zoos do not provide the best conservation methods compared to other approaches.
 - A. Animals belong in their natural habitats. They shouldn't be kept in cages on display for people to see.
 1. Loss of habitat is one of the major causes of extinction and decline in populations. An article in the international journal Nature, it is stated that "habitat destruction is the leading cause of species extinction (Pimm and Raven, 2000).
 2. Although wildlife preserves provide protection from habitat loss, poaching is still an occurrence. There is a significant effort to decrease the number of instances and even abolish it completely.
 - B. The enclosures that animals are kept in are not nearly as good as their natural habitats.
 1. Keepers try to provide everything that an animal would have in its natural habitat in its enclosure. A great deal of thought goes into each enclosure.
 2. From personal experience as a zookeeper, some things I learned about what goes into designing a habitat include: creating areas where animals like the polar bear or cheetah can long-gaze as they do in the wild, providing puzzles in the enclosure that mimic natural behaviors in apes, and choosing plants that would be found in the animals' natural habitat.
 - C. Zoos only try to display unique and exotic animals that need to be kept in the wild.
 1. A tactic used by conservationists when trying to educate the public on the importance of saving a habitat will be to promote saving a popular species when in fact multiple species will benefit from this conservation. If people are more willing to save a panda over numerous other species it shares its habitat with, why not educate people on saving this environment to in turn save several species?
 2. Anyone that has been to a zoo knows that there are more than just exotic animals there. At the Saint Louis Zoo, farm animals such as cows, pigs, sheep, and chickens are kept as well as exotic animals that everyone loves (i.e. tigers, lions, zebras, apes).

Transition: There are other reasons on why zoos should not be considered the best conservation method, but these are three I provided were: One, animals belong in their natural habitats; Two, enclosures are not as good as the natural habitat; and Three, zoos only try and display exotic animals. I will now explain how zoos provide conservation in numerous ways.

II. Zoo Conservation Methods: Zoos provide several conservation programs that include animal management, research, and educational programs.

A. Animal management focuses on the reproduction and continuation of a species.

1. Controlled breeding is a part of every AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) institution. This includes things like monitoring the genetic diversity of a species and controlling when animals reproduce through the use of contraceptives.
2. The Species Survival Plan (SSP) programs aim to control breeding in populations that are threatened or endangered. The SSP programs, according to the AZA website, “develop a Breeding and Transfer plan that identifies population management goals and recommendations to ensure the sustainability of a healthy, genetically diverse, and demographically varied population (“About animal programs,” n.d., para. 3).”
3. Programs like this help keep the genetic diversity in species, in zoos and in the wild, while also controlling population size in zoos so that the best care can be given to the animals.

B. Secondly, research done by zoos on nutrition, reproductive biology, behavior, genetics, and animal health provides the best knowledge on conservation by one single institution.

1. In his chapter opposing zoos, Dale Jamieson (1985) stated that zoos have two main focuses on research, behavior and anatomy/pathology, which in his opinion could be done better outside of zoos (p. 44).
2. Although he does provide some evidence supporting his claims, zoos today have expanded their research efforts. The Saint Louis Zoo for instance has the WildCare Institute, comprising of 13 different centers, that “takes a holistic approach to troubled ecosystems by addressing... wildlife management and recovery, conservation science, and support of the human populations that coexist with wildlife (“Saint Louis Zoo WildCare Institute”, n.d., para. 2).” Animals ranging from beetles in Southern Missouri (which I was a part of) to various mammals in Western Asia are included in this amazing program.
3. Research done by zoos can protect these at-risk species. The more species, the more biodiversity. The more biodiversity, the better ecology. The better ecology, a better place for us to live in the future.

C. Continuing with this idea of the future, the third conservation program is educational programs.

1. Education is, in my opinion, one of the most important aspects about conservation. By teaching the future generation about the current state of our biodiversity and what they can do to help save it, many species could be saved.
2. In a massive study done by AZA on impact of visiting zoos and aquariums, which included over 5,500 visitors in a three-year period, it was concluded that the institutions had an impact on the public's conservation attitudes. Data shows that there was a 64% increase in perceptions on zoos' important role in conservation and had a lasting impression of conservation awareness in 2/3rds of the visitors (Falk et al, 2007, p. 11).
3. This lasting effect of education that was provided by zoos can have a huge impact on the way people think about our planet and how it's treated.

Transition: Animal management, research, and education are only a few of the conservation efforts that come from zoos. But why are zoos the best choice for conservation?

III. Why Zoos are Best Option of Conservation

- A. The current rate of extinction is devastating the current biodiversity of Earth and zoos provide resources to aid in the conservation of wild populations.
 1. Stuart Pimm and Peter Raven (2000) used statistical analysis of the extinction curve for tropical forest, the most species rich habitat, and estimated that by 2060 roughly 50,000 species per million will be extinct (p. 844). Thought this is only one type of habitat, this rate is alarming with the amount of species that could be lost.
 2. Education and research done by zoos can help save these “hotspots” and would reduce this dramatic extinction rate to less than 10,000 species per million by 2060 (p. 844). A difference of 40,000 species is evidence that what zoos do for conservation can make a huge difference.
 3. Conservation of these wild populations will slow extinction; Conservation saves the biodiversity; Conservation is important to zoos.
- B. Secondly, Zoos provide the best outlet for education on conservation.
 1. Imagine a young child who takes their first trip to a zoo. They are exposed to a wide variety of animals that they would not have been able to see without this trip. They learn that the animals’ “home” is vanishing because of how people are treating the Earth. A spark of conservation is ignited in them and it allows them to learn more as they get older. As an older individual, they become involved with conservation efforts.
 2. Without this education through zoo trip, the child may not have learned about the danger humans are causing to the planet and the species on it.
 3. Zoos are the best opportunities to educate the public while still keeping the environment entertaining.
- C. Along with saving the biodiversity and educating the public, zoos put the wellbeing of animals first.
 1. The Saint Louis Zoo’s motto is Animals Always. The concern of the workers at the zoo, whether it be keepers, nutritionist, or even the grounds crew, nothing is done without the consideration of the animals’ best interest.
 2. Enclosures are created and modeled for what is needed by the animals. The visitor’s experience is also considered, but not if it contradicts the best interest of the animals.
 3. Whether it be the enclosure, diet, or breeding, zoos focus on providing the best care possible.

Transition: I have provided you with opposing views against zoos while providing evidence against these oppositions, explained several conservation programs provided by zoos, and gave reasons why zoos are the best option for conservation. There is more to this debate on the necessity of zoos but I hope to have explained my position on zoos.

Conclusion

The evolution of zoos has given us the opportunity to explore the world without leaving the comfort of society. Understanding the current state of the biodiversity and the dangers it is in can be brought to light with the help of zoos. No other institution or programs fully embraces conservation like zoos do.

I began this speech by showing that there is a current debate on whether zoos are important or the best option for conservation. Other options simply do not reach the same heights as that of zoos. I

understand that I may have a personal bias when it comes to zoos because I have worked at a zoo and my goal is to become a zookeeper but I have learned about numerous conservation efforts through my schooling and can confidently support the actions of zoos.

Through this speech, I hope that I have opened your opinion of what zoos do for our environment and biodiversity. Don't automatically agree with what I have said. Instead, experience and learn for yourself about what is being done for conservation today. Remember the words of Sir David Attenborough, "[Nature] is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living."

References

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