

New Dimensions in Zoo Education on Bears and Primates with ZOO,WILD and their generous and talented partners

Bear with us when we send you a Graphics CD on Signage and Education about Bears !

Bear with us ! we've put together a collection of copyright free graphics and referenceable material for you to use when you make graphics for your bear enclosures.

This is a project which we requested some time ago but just got around to. We have had our artist, Arnab Roy, paint some beautiful colour graphics of all four species of Asian bears. We have searched the web for the best sites and links. We have also contributed our own bear graphics collected through the years for you to use copyright free and a couple more folders of cartoons of bears.

We found great websites about all kinds of bears and are gathering other information from published material by authors who will agree for you to use it in your zoo graphics.

We have also included a selection of multi-media presentations by Wildlife SOS about the dancing bear racket and presentations by Zoo Outreach Organisation about How to be Creative, Bear Enclosure Design, Conservation Education, and a variety of other educational themes.

We are sending a CD to all zoos holding bears. The CD will help you improve your graphics in your zoo but we have also included other information that we have collected and distributed in ZOO ZEN about bear husbandry, etc.

Bear with us ...we might have made some mistakes. Use the graphics section just to be creative yourselves. Below are samples of principles which could well be remembered when producing your zoo signage for the public to see.

Principle : Visitors do not spend long reading signs at a zoo. This has been proven in numerous studies. Therefore you do not want to put more word and concepts in a sign that cannot be assimilated in about 10 seconds. Yes, 10 seconds; some studies say visitors average 7 seconds reading a zoo sign and some say average 12 seconds so we are saying 10 seconds.

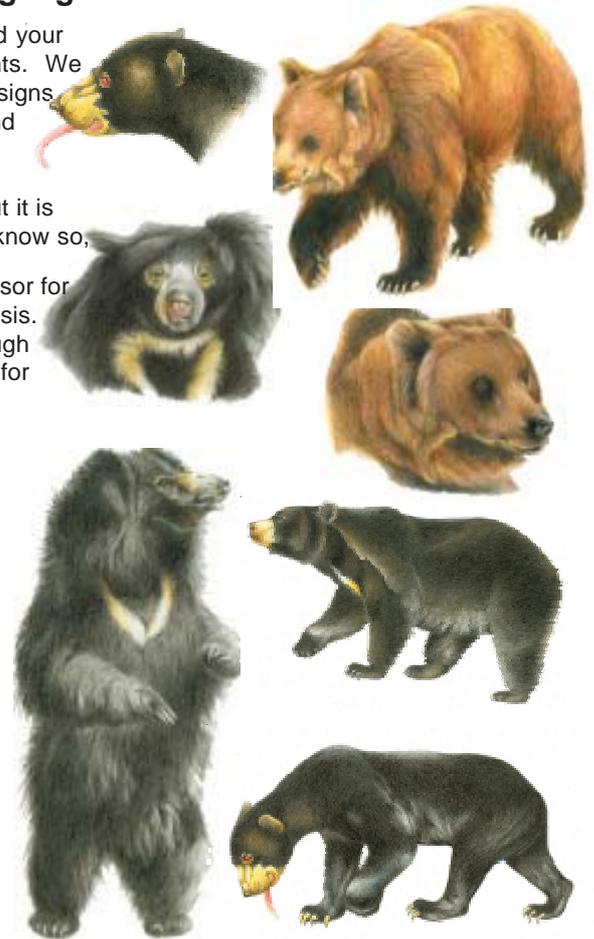
Principle : One way around this is to

put more than one sign around your enclosure at different viewpoints. We have given some samples of signs, different numbers of words and concepts so that you may be inspired to try this. This is probably the best way to go but it is not the least expensive ! We know so,

Principle : Try and find a sponsor for your signage on a species basis. That way you can ask for enough money to make several signs for bears, for tigers, for mongoose, etc. The same sponsor who gives to support the animal might agree that his money could also be spent for signage. After all, your government grant covers the feeding of the animal but rarely does it cover education.

Principle : Try and find something catchy or funny or very odd to trap visitors' attention. And try and have something for children other than boring old data. Who cares what the gestation period of a bear is anyway ? Unless an animal has an extreme characteristic, its not that interesting. Gestation period for elephant is interesting but not much for bears. Height for bears is interesting for the Kodiak Brown Bear which is close to 10 feet, but not that interesting for other bears. That is not to say you shouldn't have it on your sign; just know that people are not going to go away impressed with that or wanting to DO SOMETHING about it.

Principle : Learning biological facts has limited value in today's world which is spinning out of control. Try and teach facts that people can relate to and be sorry about. Like bears are declining and could become extinct. So what ? because any animal becoming extinct can affect an ecosystem which will affect people. And so on ... try and put conservation into your signage. Encourage people to change their behaviour in order to protect habitat and leave some space for animals and plants. It is in their best interests in the long run.



Principle : Be practical about your signage. Don't immediately invest a lot of money in an untested sign. Make your signage first on a large white piece of card – about Rs. 30 at the stationary shop – and put it up. See how people react to it. Ask visitors what they learned from it or how they feel upon seeing it. Ask all ages, sexes, and economic classes. When you get the idea that your sign is not being effective, start again. Ask visitors what are their concerns, why they came to the zoo, what they want to know ... that may or may not help you but the principle here is not to just assume what you think is interesting is in fact interesting to all, or any ! Doing zoo education is humbling !

Principle : Don't be limited by what other zoos do. Be creative and practical ... but be scientific, e.g., test your theories and modify them when they are not working.