

Zoos! Two views... Who do you believe?

(Compiled by Peter Dickinson, Zoo News Digest; edited by Sally Walker)

Primates are at greater risk in the wild than in zoos

On 20 May 2008, *The Times on Line*, reported that the internationally famous and much beloved student, researcher and advocate of the large apes and other primates, stated at a public function that "zoos are the best hope". She opined that primates were "at greater risk" in the wild than at zoos, at a public function to open a new Edinburgh Zoo primate enclosure, according to Mike Wade, local reporter.

This doesn't mean, of course, that Jane Goodall thinks all primates should be captured and kept in zoos, but that the species itself has a far better chance of survival if some of them are kept in zoos. At 74 years of age, Dr. Goodall is currently president of the Scottish animal rights NGO called Advocates for Animals which, incidentally, helped Zoo Outreach Organisation get welfare education projects started in its early days. Goodall, had opened a £1.6 million exhibit for groups of squirrel and capuchin monkeys which allegedly will help in the Edinburgh Zoo's research in understanding of primate and human behaviour.

Dr. Goodall spent decades, truly her whole life, following chimpanzees through the Gombe National Park, Tanzania, studying their behaviour, recording their actions, and generating much greater knowledge about these apes than ever before. Dr. Goodall, in defending the keeping of primates in (good) zoos, makes a very strong statement, both about (good) zoos as well about about the state of the (wild) world today. Knowing some of Dr. Goodall's admirers as I do, some of them (who hate and despise zoos with an overwhelming passion), I really wonder how they are taking this seeming about-face. But Goodall has never been a fanatic against zoos and she knows that there are many do not shares her views of zoos. Earlier in the year Edinburgh opened another elaborated enclosure, a £5.6 million Budongo Trail, for chimpanzees. Despite the fact that the enclosure is largest of its kind in the world and can conduct research, it was sorely criticised by a member of the entertainment industry, who stated that parents should take their kids to an abattoir instead!

The choice for conservationists, according to Goodall, is between "playing safe" meaning protecting highly vulnerable species in captivity, or actually gambling on their survival in the wild with natural places being in a terrible state. She said "In an ideal world chimpanzees and monkeys would be out in the wild as they were intended to be. But in the real world, there are not so many places like that where they can be safe ... and they are getting smaller all the time.

The choice is between living in wonderful facilities like these where they are probably better off, or

living the wild in an area like Budongo, where one in six gets chimps get caught in a wire snare, and countries like Congo, where chimpanzees, monkeys and gorillas are shot for food commercially. If I were a chimpanzee, I know what I would choose," said Dr. Goodall.

Dr. Goodall was the researchers discovered the first instance of non-human primates use of tools, in early 1960's in Gombe. The work she did there provided a framework and foundation for future primatological research. She founded the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977 to protect chimpanzees and their habitats.

Dr. Goodall believes international logging companies have contributed mostly to the enormous decline of Congo basin chimpanzees (from est, 2,000,000 in 1910 to about 220,000). Dr. Goodall is hopeful for the future however, because we still have a chance to reach today's children. She has started an international NGO for education which aims to teach children to repair and certainly not to perpetuate the damage their elders have done. In order to do that, they will need living animals ... from zoos, maybe.

Zoos no longer have a role

Another view comes also on 20 May from Sunday morning Herald, also web version, by Steve Meacham, describes the views by Raj Panjwani which delivered a keynote lecture recently at an animal rights symposium sponsored by the University of New South Wales Sydney, Australia and Voiceless. His view is that with television and the internet, people don't need to see live animals anymore. Panjiwani is an advocate for animal protection, having scored some victories including ivory trade, dissection choices, etc. Panjiwani was also the attorney who guided the highly questionable court ruling banning Indian circuses from exhibiting or performing certain animals. This success for Mr. Panjwani and his client, Maneka Gandhi, led to enormous suffering of the animals which then had to be kept in tiny cages without the relief of performance to stretch their cramped muscles and many without food, since the circuses lost revenue due to nonperformance of animals. Ultimately zoos came to the rescue of these animals which were unfit for conservation breeding and had to be housed in costly rescue facilities on zoo premises. Mr Panjwani is still fighting to close India's country's zoos... and do what with THAT number of animals.

Which view for you ?

Which view reflects today's modern situation better? Which expert seems most wise ? Your views are welcome. Write to us if you have a view. ZOO, POB 1683, Coimbatore 4 or zooreach@zooreach.org.