

The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy -- Chapter 6

Communication: Marketing and Public Relations

Summary

This chapter presents a vision of zoos and aquariums being among the major voices of conservation through their effectiveness in communicating conservation issues, and their integrity and expertise. It lays out a set of principles through which zoos and aquariums can best communicate their conservation achievements. These principles include: zoos and aquariums are universal, inspirational, and educational and they care for their animals. They are conservation bodies which help effect change; they bring benefits to urban populations, are accountable and ethical and the support of members and visitors helps conservation in the wild. But, in addition to conservation, education, welfare and research, zoos and aquariums are about fun, and conservation and fun are not mutually exclusive. To raise the profile of zoos and aquariums as conservation organizations, every institution needs a communications strategy. This strategy should be designed to include identification of the audience, and the integration of communication through collaboration between marketing staff and animal, education and research staff, as well as other wildlife organizations. This integration should extend to such activities as collection planning, ethical review processes, enclosure design, events and interpretation. Communication messages should be factual, positive, pro-active and optimistic. The strategy should include networking and information sharing with other organizations (for marketing and benchmarking) and increasing, through training, the professionalism of staff communication skills. Zoos and aquariums should use the full range of communication media available and recognize that all staff and volunteers need to be well informed, so they can act as message bearers in their families and communities. It is also advocated that zoos and aquariums involve anti-zoo people/groups in debate and be open and transparent in all their activities. The communications strategy should be monitored, evaluated and shared. A strong, integrated communications strategy has a major role in developing zoos and aquariums as positive voices for conservation.



WORLD ASSOCIATION
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Vision

Zoos and aquariums and their national and regional associations will become highly effective in communicating conservation issues and their role in conservation. They will become better recognized as one of the major and most trusted voices speaking on behalf of wildlife and wild places.

6.1 Introduction

In a world of rapidly diminishing habitats, disappearing species and increasing urbanization, zoos and aquariums are uniquely placed to connect people to their natural environment, to inspire them to care, and to encourage them to play an active part in reducing the relentless rate of environmental destruction.

Zoos and aquariums have been working successfully for the conservation of threatened animal species for at least 70 years, but this needs to be communicated more effectively with an emphasis on how little of the wild is left and how seriously wildlife is threatened. Some people still have reservations about keeping animals in zoos and aquariums, and are confused by the relationship between visitor attraction and animal conservation.

This confusion is compounded by anti-zoo groups and some animal welfare groups forcing the zoo and aquarium community to react to criticism and to explain or defend particular issues such as animal welfare or ethics. When zoos are on the defensive, valuable resources of time and energy are diverted from communicating conservation and explaining the core achievements of the zoo community. The general success of zoos and aquariums as conservation organizations that strive to meet the highest standards of animal welfare is a story still largely untold and not sufficiently celebrated.

What zoos can do

Zoos and aquariums are uniquely able to carry out an enormous range of collective conservation activities. This is because they:

- keep and care for living animals, often undertaking important *ex situ* conservation functions;
- involve and stimulate vast numbers of people (around 10% of the world's population), many of whom are disconnected from nature in their daily lives;
- have invested themselves in unprecedented global partnerships;
- reach out from their home communities to wild places around the world, and carry out valuable *in situ* conservation;
- carry out research for the benefit of *ex situ* and *in situ* animal welfare and conservation;
- educate people about conservation and biodiversity, reaching millions of people around the world, from all cultures and walks of life;
- raise the debate about wildlife management and conservation, and influence politicians, the media and others;
- foster conservation experience and expertise.

Supported by effective communication, the zoo and aquarium community can make a vital contribution to the preservation of biodiversity on this planet.

6.2 Current perceptions

Over the past 10 years, since the publication of the World Zoo Conservation Strategy, there has been a slow but steady increase in awareness about the role of zoos and aquariums in meaningful conservation. However, even amongst zoo and aquarium visitors, concerns about welfare still remain, and a sense of 'mixed feelings' about the positive role that zoos may have in conservation. Several of the problematical perceptions are listed below.

- Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are fewer welfare concerns about animals in safari parks compared to animals in traditional zoos, and people are generally less concerned about fish kept in aquariums than they are about mammals and birds kept in zoos.
- All available research shows that the majority of zoo and aquarium visitors are still motivated by the quest for 'a good day out'. This can lead to a confusion in the public's attitude to the role of zoos and aquariums – if they are about fun, how can they also be about something as worthy as conservation?
- The word 'zoo' has different meanings in different cultures; sometimes the word itself can be a problem – evoking ideas of animals kept in old-fashioned menageries, one of each sort like in stamp collections.
- A general misconception which needs to be addressed is that zoos are privately owned and very wealthy. The ownership and governance of zoos varies throughout the world: some zoos are run by charitable trusts or not-for-profit organizations, some are private enterprises and others are operated by national, state or local governments.
- There is a widespread lack of awareness of the national, regional and international networks between zoological organizations, as well as networks with conservation agencies.
- There are few developed measures and published reports on zoo performance against conservation action. One of the complicating factors is the time required to effect change.
- There is little public awareness of the stringent professional standards which zoos and aquariums have to meet when successfully accredited by regional zoo and aquarium associations.

The challenge is to help visitors understand the connection between their visit and the work of zoos and aquariums in achieving conservation, and to reassure them about the increasingly high levels of welfare for zoo animals.

6.3 New goals

In terms of communication, zoos and aquariums will be:

- effective in inspiring audiences, communicating the conservation message to them, and practising effective evaluation;
- recognized as an expert voice on conservation issues, and as a vibrant and enduring community of institutions that reconnect people with nature;
- trusted as a reliable and accurate information source, as socially and culturally relevant institutions, and as practising what they preach.

They will also welcome constructive criticism and will work to address any such legitimate concerns.

Zoos and aquariums will communicate their achievements by focusing on the following messages.

Zoos and aquariums are universal

Zoos and aquariums are uniquely placed to be an effective force for positive action in a rapidly changing world. Over the next 10 years, they should communicate this message so that they no longer need to apologize for holding animals in managed environments. Rather, their value will be widely understood and they will be appreciated for their contribution to the conservation of biodiversity.

Zoos and aquariums should focus on the uniqueness of what they have to offer – living animals, and staff experienced and committed to their care and long-term survival as species in the wild. Collections should encourage visitors to experience and enjoy the sense of surprise and wonder engendered by proximity to real, living animals in naturalistic habitats.

Zoos and aquariums are conservation centres

Zoos and aquariums should encourage visitors to understand the links between the animals they see and the animals in the wild, and how visitors are helpful to both. They should also promote the *in situ* conservation successes of other zoos and aquariums and of other conservation organizations.

Zoos and aquariums help to effect change

Effective communication affects not just what people think about zoos and aquariums, but what they think about the world around them and their part in helping to preserve its biodiversity and habitats. Information about re-using and recycling should all be part of the institution's message on environmental sustainability.

People will be able to 'make a difference' as a result of their visit and zoos and aquariums must give visitors practical ideas and suggestions as to what personal action they can take, however small. Each institution should demonstrate the relevance of conservation to people's lives, and make it easy for people to take action.

Probably the most effective way that zoos and aquariums can encourage change is by example. They should strive to become environmentally sustainable in all their activities: by using appropriate building materials, waste management, catering supplies, fair trade and ethical policies for fundraising, sponsorship and investments. Zoos and aquariums can celebrate these activities with pride.

By communicating what it is doing for conservation, the zoo community will not only increase the understanding and appreciation of its role in the conservation of biodiversity but also encourage visitors to take positive actions to make a difference to life on this planet. People will thereby feel less guilty and powerless about the state of the planet and more willing and able to make a personal contribution.

Zoos and aquariums are inspirational

Zoos and aquariums will inspire people to help conserve biodiversity. There is a demonstrable thread which runs from conservation through education, education through inspiration, and inspiration through fun.

Zoos and aquariums are accountable

Zoos and aquariums should be honest and open about all their activities and should welcome close scrutiny of all their welfare, breeding, research and education programmes. In years to come, the word 'zoo' should no longer have any kind of pejorative or questionable connotation; it should have become as acceptable as the word 'aquarium' has become in recent years.

Zoos and aquariums care for their animals

Zoos and aquariums must communicate the continuous improvements they make in animal welfare and enclosure design, bringing benefits for both animals and visitors – spacious, natural habitats which enrich the lives of animals and make for a more interesting experience for visitors.

Animal welfare is constantly improving, as the knowledge of animals' needs – physical, environmental, social, psychological – increases with research and observation. Animals in well-run zoos and aquariums have a very high quality of life – with good diets, veterinary care, appropriate habitats and an absence of predators. Zoos and aquariums also commission and welcome new research on managing their animals, both physically and psychologically.

Increasingly, there is stringent and sensible legislation for the protection of animals and people in zoos and similar institutions. Good zoos and aquariums welcome, and participate in shaping, improved legislation; they must be prepared to state that those zoos that fail to comply, either in actuality or in spirit, are unacceptable. Apart from the potential to compromise animal welfare, poor zoos do serious damage to the reputation and image of good zoos everywhere. The zoo and aquarium community needs to do all it can to help improve those institutions which are poorly maintained, but good zoos and aquariums should be careful to distance themselves from those that fail, and strongly publicize their exclusion or dismissal from regional or national membership bodies if they do not meet minimum standards for welfare, conservation and education.

Zoos and aquariums bring benefits to urban populations

Urban children today are the conservationists and opinionformers of tomorrow. Zoos and aquariums are places of relative peace and tranquillity, sometimes even spirituality; they should stress the value of allowing people to get back in touch with nature, and feel good about themselves and their place in the natural scheme of things. Zoos and aquariums are places where people gather together as families and social groups, and learn and develop shared values about wildlife and the natural world.

Zoos and aquariums have an ethical approach

The ethics of managing animals are necessarily complex; the zoo community needs to strive for a shared and universal approach to explaining difficult ethical issues arising from managing animals for conservation, including culling for management purposes.

Zoos and aquariums are educational

Education has long been recognized as a major success of zoos and aquariums, but zoos need to explain more about what this actually means, how they can be places of life-long discovery and learning, how topics can be offered relevant to a broad range of school curricula, and how education can often lead to change.

Zoo and aquarium membership helps conservation in the wild

People can be encouraged to support zoos and aquariums for altruistic rather than economic reasons if they are told

how their money helps directly with conservation in the wild, how it helps to improve welfare in the zoo or aquarium, and how the zoo is working with other conservation bodies with events, promotions, exhibitions etc. Zoos and aquariums should never miss opportunities to thank people for the support that their day visit, subscription or sponsorship is giving to conservation and biodiversity.

6.4 Fun and conservation are not mutually exclusive

There should be no problem in promoting zoos and aquariums as being about fun as well as about conservation, education, welfare and research. A zoo visit is supposed to be fun; it should remind people of the wonder of life and the joy of the natural world. Not even the most carefully crafted wildlife documentary can replace the vivid experience of seeing real animals, properly cared for, living in stimulating and naturalistic habitats, or hearing first hand the personal stories of animal keeping staff. Carefully thought out communication strategies can help visitors to learn while they are having fun.

- Interactive experiences can be achieved through the interactions of zoo staff with animals when keepers or presenters demonstrate and explain natural behaviours. Such interactions should place no unnecessary stress on the animals involved.
- Visitors should be encouraged to understand that the fun that they are experiencing during their visit today has a direct link to the conservation of threatened species tomorrow.
- Visitors should be provided with every opportunity to talk to staff, to be treated as guests on a shared journey of discovery and appreciation for the future of the natural world.
- When zoos and aquariums are fully integrated with other conservation organizations and agencies, visitors will feel good about their visit, knowing that it is contributing positively to the conservation of threatened species and habitats.
- People will be motivated by altruism when they become members and sponsors of zoos and aquariums – they will join to help further their conservation goals, not just because membership offers a 'season ticket' to visit the attraction or other benefits.

The overarching aim of communications in this context is for zoos and aquariums to be recognized and respected as conservation organizations. This conservation role will be fully compatible with the fun that zoos and aquariums offer to visitors: fun and conservation are not mutually exclusive.

6.5 Getting the message across

Design a strategy

A practical first step that any zoo or aquarium can undertake is to design a communications strategy.

Identifying the audience

Visitors are the key target audience, but the zoo community should also communicate its conservation success story to politicians, the media, academics, educationalists and other influential people. Zoos and aquariums should communicate more effectively with each other and with all staff and volunteers within their own organization.

Integrated communication

An integrated approach to communication is required to communicate effectively the conservation work of zoos and aquariums in and out of the wild. For example, zoos and aquariums should establish links between marketing staff, scientists, animal staff and education staff to ensure shared knowledge within each organization. They should also establish links with local staff and wildlife organizations working in the field, and should establish links with institutions in the countries where *in situ* work is taking place.

Marketing and education people within zoos and aquariums must work closely together to ensure that they are communicating the same messages, albeit in different ways and possibly to different audiences.

Integrated zoo activities

Marketing should be fully integrated into other zoo activities: animal collection planning, ethical review processes, enclosure design, events and interpretation. The polarity which sometimes can be found between marketing and animal staff must be broken: everyone is working towards the same goal, and activities will be more effective if people work together.

Positive communication

Zoos and aquariums should ensure that communication does not sound like justification. There is no need to take a defensive position; instead, the zoo world should take a positive, proactive approach in all its communications. In particular, the institutions should celebrate more of their achievements, and stress and explain the need for conservation and biodiversity. In doing so, they will make doubters feel more comfortable, even enthusiastic, about visiting a zoo or aquarium.

Zoos and aquariums must be much clearer, more concise and more consistent in the messages that they promote. To do this, they must work harder to agree what the messages are. Messages should be positive and optimistic. The progress of destruction of our planet's natural resources, habitats and wildlife can be alarming and seemingly insurmountable, so zoos and aquariums should take every opportunity to let people know about the conservation success stories, and how they can participate. The decline of biodiversity cannot be allowed to continue, and the institutions must remind people that they are a positive force for good in the battle against this decline.

Zoo and aquarium communicators must be clear about what is meant by conservation. In particular, they must acknowledge that there is a difference between direct conservation – supporting fieldwork in the wild and those programmes out of the wild –and indirect conservation which works on changing attitudes and behaviours.

Working with other zoos and aquariums

Zoos and aquariums must strive harder at working together. Through networking, information exchange and benchmarking, they can share basic information which can then be communicated to a wider audience. Institutions need to share data, for both benchmarking and marketing purposes, for example the number of endangered species

in managed programmes, breeding success stories, number of visitors exposed to conservation messages, number of school children and range of topics being taught, number and range of research projects being carried out, those species that have been returned to the wild successfully (being careful not to raise inappropriate expectations here), and the number and type of *in situ* conservation projects supported by zoos and aquariums. WAZA is in the process of compiling a global data base of conservation projects that its members are involved in.

By collecting and sharing information of this nature, the messages will become more robust, zoos and aquariums will build and strengthen their networks, and the zoo community will become a more collective entity. In parallel, this form of networking should be extended to conservation agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Increasing professionalism

The zoo community needs to raise the level of its professionalism in the communications skills of its staff. Marketing people should be considered an essential part of the senior management team of any zoo or aquarium, and their skills should be developed through training, travel and networking.

Zoos and aquariums should have strategies in place, supported by appropriate technologies, so that they can communicate messages quickly and effectively with each other and with the media, relevant NGOs and others. It is essential that, in an emergency, zoos work to an agreed crisis plan that is appropriate and relevant to their own organization and to their regional membership organizations.

Methods for communication

Zoos and aquariums should take every opportunity to explain what they are actually achieving for conservation by whatever means. The Internet is one tool for doing this. On a more informal but no less important level, all staff must be well informed, not just those that are in the forefront of talking to visitors, so that when they talk to friends and family, they can explain what their organization is doing for conservation.

Communicating conservation can be done in a variety of ways, ranging from formal talks and tours, interpretative signs and guide books, through to leaflets, posters, calendars, media stories, family events and workshops, art and photographic exhibitions and even paper bags in gift shops. There is almost no limit to the variety of media which can be used to support and communicate even quite complicated conservation issues, at the same time reinforcing the message about the conservation work of zoos and aquariums.

What language?

Zoos and aquariums should use, wherever possible, simple and direct language, avoiding the use of jargon or unexplained technical terms.

Anti-zoo groups

Zoos and aquariums should face detractors with honesty and sound science. They should genuinely listen to their

critics, share their concerns, and invite them in to see what zoos and aquariums are doing in the 21st century. Wherever possible, they should involve anti-zoo people or groups in the debate. If zoos understand the issues raised by such people, they can agree on a consistent message and strategy within local, regional or national networks so that they can take control of the debate and move it to another level – about the long-term value of zoo conservation. The zoo community must be pro-active in celebrating all that is good about zoos and aquariums.

Zoos and aquariums must be open and transparent in all their activities, in public and behind the scenes. A zoo that is comfortable with visitors seeing how it cares for its animals is likely to have it right.

Zoos and aquariums should accept that they will never persuade everyone, but they can go a long way towards enlightening and convincing people with doubts.

6.6 Evaluating success

A variety of indicators can be used to evaluate the success of an agreed communications strategy.

- In the short-term, zoos and aquariums will need to test that their messages are clear and understood.
- In the longer term, they should see an increase in the

public's awareness of conservation issues in general, of the conservation role of zoos and aquariums in particular, and of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and its mission ('United For Conservation').

- Support for zoos and aquariums can be measured by increased visitor numbers and by increased zoo membership numbers and increased sponsorship schemes, especially those prompted by support for conservation.
- General media success can be measured by a continuing increase in positive zoo/conservation news stories or features.
- There should be an increase in partnerships with other conservation bodies.

Recommendation

The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Strategy (WZACS) strongly recommends that all zoo and aquarium associations, and all zoos and aquariums, however small or large, design and implement a communications strategy. This should include the following basic steps: define the overall communication goals; identify the target audiences; decide key messages; choose tactics and methods; identify resources available and needed; and develop monitoring and evaluation techniques.

2nd International Congress on Zookeeping — continued news

The registrations for 2nd International Congress on Zookeeping 7-11 May 2006 on the Gold Coast Australia have now opened! Thanks to some very supportive sponsors registration costs for early bird full registration are AUD\$450. Based on today's exchange rates this works out approximately US \$338 or Euro 279. Accommodation is additional to this and we have secured a good rate at the conference hotel - the Gold Coast International. Triple share for 4 nights works out at AUD\$280 or approximately US\$210 or Euro 174 which includes breakfast.

The full conference registration will cover all events which include icebreaker Sunday night, Dreamworld dinner Monday night, breakfast at Currumbin Sanctuary Tuesday morning, Barbaque dinner Tuesday night and the conference dinner at Seaworld Wednesday night. All functions include food and some drinks. Morning, afternoon tea & lunch will be supplied each day Monday to Thursday.

Accommodation is limited so it is important that people register early for the conference. The early bird conference rate finishes 28 February 2006 after which full registrations rise to AUD\$550.

We are offering a number of pre and post conference tours which include to Australia Zoo, Koala habitat field work, North Queensland, Fraser Island and O'Reilley's Rainforest Retreat. All information on these tours is available in the conference registration information on the ICZ website. Registration information, registration forms and accommodation booking forms are all available on the ICZ

website - <<http://www.iczoo.org/>>

If you require any further information feel free to email me. Liz Romer, ICZ Conference Convener Email: <slromer@bigpond.com>

Editors Note

We have received news that Kiran Moktan has been sponsored by the Puget Sound Chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers and SOS Rhino. This sponsorship came about because a couple of visitors from the Puget Sound Zoo visited the Darjeeling Zoo and Kiran and Sunita Pradhan were kind enough to spend some time with them. The visitors remembered, and thought of Kiran when conference funds in their possession were secure.

We at ZOO are facilitating Kiran's travel and other aspects of his visit. We hope Kiran will benefit a lot from his experience and return to India ready to organise the Indian zookeepers in a way that would enhance their professionalism. Kiran is literate in English as well as his native Bengali and perhaps other Indian languages as well and does an amazing job keeping the Snow Leopards, in which he has specialised, at Darjeeling Zoo. Kiran has kept incredible records of captive Snow Leopard behaviour and biology. Darjeeling Zoo, as a result, may have the most complete information about Snow Leopards in captivity in the world. We hope Kiran will report on this at the conference and thus represent the achievement of his institution.

There may be more scholarships but you should apply now. We have had some applications from Directors etc. and request that no senior staff apply. Only zookeepers will be assisted.