



KINSHIP CIRCLE

WHY I'LL NEVER BE A ZOO MOM

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By Brenda Shoss

Soccer mom. Backstage mom. No problem. But the day my son pleads, "Mommy, can I go on the zoo field trip?" the answer will be no.

I want my son to see animals. Just not at a zoo, where creatures live in imitation of their wild essence. But how do you tell a kid, crumpled permission slip in hand, "You cannot go to the zoo with your classmates?"

"Mommy, puh-lease!" The effa-lants my three-year-old adores roam 20 to 50 miles everyday. The American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) lets members stock elephants in one-fortieth of an acre of yard space per animal. A generic polar bear exhibit is one-millionth the scope of a polar bear's 31,000 sq. mile wilderness domain.

A 2003 Oxford University study published in the journal *Nature* lists polar bears, lions, tigers, cheetahs and other large carnivores as lousy candidates for captivity. "It could be that...some species find roaming pleasurable," states research biologist Dr. Georgia Mason. "They might



be designed in such a way that roaming makes their central nervous system develop properly." Many restrained animals resort to stereotypies, a neurotic repetition of gestures such as pacing, swaying, head-bobbing or bar-biting. In captivity, polar bears pace 25% of the time and infant mortality rates jump to 65% for wide-ranging animals. Dr. Mason claims animals with relatively limited natural ranges cope better with confinement.

Cope for what purpose? "What is denied by zoo apologists is that the animals are there almost exclusively as entertainment," writes Animal Protection Institute's Barry Kent MacKay in *When Zoos Tell Lies*. "Whether the goal is to make profits or enhance pleasure of residents and tourists, it is argued people learn about animals by visiting zoos."

The Education Excuse

Zoo education is often "miseducation," as MacKay, an ornithological expert, observed at Sacramento Zoo. Most of birds, situated around a pseudo Lake Maracaibo (the real lake is in Venezuela), do not exist in that part of the world. "Implying [these birds are] native to Lake Maracaibo is like saying the polar bear can be found in Michigan, since polar bears and Lake Michigan are in North America. You are closer to polar bears in the wild if you visit downtown Milwaukee than you are close to southern screamers if you paddle around Lake Maracaibo," MacKay writes.

Still, there must be some educational value in glimpsing a real creature who will never scamper through your backyard. In fact, conservation efforts for dolphins and other cetaceans stem primarily from the public's contact with captive specimens, according to a zoo spokesperson who spoke at a symposium MacKay attended.

If captivity enables people to recognize dolphins as perceptive, social beings, "are we morally justified in keeping them in captivity?" MacKay asked. "No," the speaker responded, "I don't think it's justified."



PHOTO FROM IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

Unnatural Habitats, Premature Death

In April 2004 Maybelle the elephant died at the San Francisco Zoo. Her sudden demise followed the slaughter of Calle, a 38-year-old Asian elephant with prolonged infirmities due to insufficient exercise and social interaction. Wild female elephants retain lifelong ties with their mothers. Males remain in the herd until 10 to 15 years of age. Within the secluded confines of a zoo, elephants often succumb to zoochosis, a type of psychological distress. An estimated 50% endure chronic arthritis and foot abscesses from life upon concrete or hardened dirt and sand.

More than 90 wild-caught African elephants have prematurely died in North American displays over 14 years. "Their requirements are so substantial, it is probably beyond the capabilities of most zoos to even begin to resolve them," notes David Hancocks, past director of Woodland Park Zoo.

Impossible care demands and regulatory loopholes spell disaster for animals. U.S. Department of Agriculture oversees zoos, but lacks authority to train, test and license animal handlers who work at zoos. USDA could not investigate a string of suspect deaths at the Smithsonian's respected National Zoological Park in Washington D.C. because the zoo is an autonomous federal entity.

In January 2003, a 600-pound female pygmy hippopotamus was discovered dead at the National Zoo. During the same month, two red pandas ingested poisonous rat pellets left in their yard. In late 2002, zookeepers euthanized a cheetah and bobcat with kidney disease. A lion was found dead in his pen as a result of excess blood and fluid in his lungs. Within one week, a gray seal and giraffe succumbed to digestive disorders. In March 2004, National Zoo director Lucy H. Spelman announced her resignation after an impartial review denounced the zoo's care, pest control, record-keeping and oversight practices.

Intimidation-Style Training

Some accredited zoos hire circus-type trainers to subdue animals with chains, bullhooks, and food/water deprivation. The AZA does not ask member zoos to switch to "protected contact," a more lenient disciplinary format. Several years ago, Oregon Zoo's Fred Marion came to work intoxicated. Bellowing profanities, he battered a 6-year-old elephant's head, legs, tail, ears and shoulder with an ankus hook. Marion twisted the sharp hook inside Rose-Tu's anus until the sodomized elephant screamed. Rose-Tu suffered 176 puncture wounds, bacterial abscesses, and extreme trauma at her anal opening. Zoo personnel had reprimanded Marion for past alcohol-inspired violence against elephants. Eventually they fired him. But the USDA never cited Oregon Zoo for lack of investigative or punitive measures. Since animal handlers don't need a USDA permit, Marion may seek employment elsewhere.

The Conservation Cover-Up

In summer 2003, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service granted San Diego Zoo and Lowry Park Zoological Garden permits to import 11 African elephants from the 74,130-acre Hlane Royal National Park in Swaziland. Save Wild Elephants Coalition filed an emergency appeal, arguing the import violated the Endangered Species Act, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of Wild Flora and Fauna, and National Environmental Policy Act. Still, the breeding age 12-year-olds were taken from their savannah homeland to live in small lots in San Diego and Tampa.

The zoos' rationale? Conservation. Rather than address habitat preservation or poaching, the zoos told a press-perfect tale about rescuing elephants from authorities set to cull the "overpopulated" 36-member herd. Making babies was the likely motive. PETA says "heavily marketed newborns can easily bring in an additional

30,000 visitors. Some Swaziland elephants selected for export may have been pregnant."

"Rarely does the presence of any zoo animal have the slightest thing to do with effective conservation that will lead to restoration of depleted wild populations," the AP's MacKay writes in *Captive Breeding: To What Purpose?* MacKay says captive breeding programs can support conservation if they follow a Species Survival Plan (SSP) that releases animals back into the wild. More often, breeding zoos cash in on baby animals. Under the auspices of "Species Protection," the majority don't register animals in SSPs and evade scrutiny of their conservation projects.

Where Do Surplus Animals Wind-up?

Some zoos over-produce animals to sell to trophy-hunt ranches, "exotic pet" dealers, unaccredited "roadside" zoos and game farms. Scant laws exist to safeguard exotic (even endangered) species from the lucrative black market. At canned hunt facilities hunters pay to shoot, bow-hunt or spear captive-bred animals accustomed to human contact. Often anticipating a meal, staked, caged or fenced-in animals are easily killed at close range. To preserve their "trophy" hunters aim for the body, leaving animals to slowly bleed to death. "Retirement" for the elderly may be transfer to another entertainment venue. After years of servitude, a Lowry Park Zoo elephant was dispatched to Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey Circus. Life for worn out animals rarely winds up in a sanctuary.

Proximity is seductive. To educate and amuse ourselves, we take an animal's natural home, family and freedom. Nope. I'll never be a zoo mom. It's not the lesson I want to teach my son.



ST. LOUIS ZOO: 8/3/10, Juara, an orangutan age 25, dies post pyretical from anesthesia caused respiratory arrest. 12/09: A baby chimpanzee dies in an undisclosed incident after birth, from an umbilical cord infection. 3/09: Hope, a polar bear age 23, is euthanized with a grapefruit-size liver tumor. 2/28/09: Muchana, Western Lowlands Gorilla age 8, is found strangled by a rope in his enclosure. 2/15/09: Cinder, a hairless chimpanzee, 14, fatally collapses with no explanation. 2/12/09: Maliha is second elephant to test positive for potentially fatal elephant herpes virus. 2/10/09: Elephant Jade contracts herpes virus from unknown source.

3/14/07: Clara, an Asian elephant, 54, is euthanized due to crippling arthritis and chronic foot disease after decades in the zoo's tiny exhibit. 6/05: Polar bear Penny succumbs to infection when 2 stillborn fetuses cause her uterus to rupture. Zoo is unaware she's pregnant. 5/05: Polar bear Churchill, 18, dies in surgery to extract plastic bag and cloth lodged in his stomach. USDA later fines STL Zoo \$7,500 for offenses related to the polar bear deaths. St. Louis Zoo lands in "Ten Worst Zoos for Elephants" 2008 List, from Calif.-based In Defense Of Animals.

SACRAMENTO ZOO: 2/25/09, Urban, a Sumatran orangutan, 28, dies from severe nervous system and leg muscle inflammation.

INDIANAPOLIS ZOO: 2/19/09, 15 bonnethead sharks die in ocean display, prompting zoo to examine its procedures and training.

BROOKFIELD ZOO, CHICAGO: 1/09, Giraffe breaks his neck when entangled in rope supposedly out of reach. Zoo is under Agriculture Dept. watch for its third unexpected death in less than 6 months.

HOUSTON ZOO: 11/9/08, Mac, a 2-year-old male elephant calf, dies from the herpesvirus.

MARYLAND ZOO: 6/12/08, Rustie, a 23-year-old female chimpanzee, dies of unknown causes. Chimps can live to mid-40s.

KNOXVILLE, TN ZOO: 5/16/08, Mugsy, 17, a chimpanzee dies prematurely. Chimps typically live into mid-40s.

DALLAS ZOO: 5/12/08, Keke, African elephant, dies following deaths of Boris, zoo's sole lion (4/08); Hildy, a giraffe (9/07). Keke's death leaves Jenny alone. Public demands her release to The Elephant Sanctuary (TN), as officials work to sell her to another zoo.

FORT WORTH, TX ZOO: 1/24/08, Babe, an Asian elephant, dies during labor, along with her unborn calf.