Zoo Debates

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**Abstract**

The author of this research paper found that zoo debates seem to be a topic that not many people are fully understood. Without providing the positive or negative information about zoo, people tend to be misinterpreted and confuse about the real perceptions of the zoo. With the extensive research and studies on Saipan zoo, this article presents the results on how the people’s perception of the zoo.

**Background**

Currently, it was estimated that there are more than 2,800 zoos and aquariums in the world (Americanzoo). Within the 2,800 zoos, there are approximately 751,931 animals in the accredited institutions. Also, according to World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), Zoos around the world generate and attract more than 700 million visitors each year (WASA). Zoos seem to have many positive purposes such as serving human entertainment, give educational opportunities to children, and help save endangered species. However, people rarely stop to consider the other side of the equation: the animals. The populations of lions are estimated to be as low as 32,000 in 2012. Their numbers has dropped down nearly 100,000 from 50 years ago (Lion Population). This paper will consider the health and well-being of lions who roam the wild compared with lions who roam in zoo cages.

First, let us consider lions that live in the wild. The natural homes to lions are safari grasslands of Africa and some woodlands of Asia. In the wild, lions are at their most comfortable state they can ever be in. Born and raised, they interact with each other and other animals to survive. Lions in the wild tend to group together in a pack, which is called, “Pride” (San Diego Zoo). They create this group so they learn to socialize and protect each other from outside predators. Compared with lions in zoos, they don’t have other predators to worry about. In a typical zoo, there are about three lions in each confined space (San Diego Zoo). Being that, when lions are placed in zoos, they are confined in an artificial environment which provides safety and security. Zookeepers are the people that keep in watch of the lions to make sure that they eat, that they are healthy, and kept safe.

Beside the living condition of lions, food is another main factor that seems to have great influence on how lions live. Lions that are born in the wild are able to hunt through survival skills. Being in the wild, lions finding their own food is a lifestyle. Males are the ones that keep guard of the cubs while the females hunt. According to the article from Great Cats: National Zoo, “Lions eat primarily large animals, such as zebra and wildebeest, weighing from 100 to 1,000 pounds. In times of shortage, they also catch and eat a variety of smaller animals from rodents to reptiles. Lions steal kills from hyenas, leopards, and other predators, but may also lose their catches to hyena groups. Lions may also feed on domestic livestock, especially in areas near villages.” Compared to lions in the wild, lions in zoos’ don not have natural survival instincts because of the fact zookeepers are the ones that feed them. When in a confined space, lions are used to specific times to expect food from the zookeepers. According to the article, Great Cats: National Zoo, “Keepers feed the Zoo's lions beef. Twice a week the lions received bones (usually a beef hind shank, half femur, or knuckle).” Both zoo lions and lions in the wild, though differ in population and environment, they both are well fed.

Aside from how and what lions eat depending if they live in the wild or the zoo, do they live longer on either one? According to the website Zoo.org, the wild male lions live approximately 12-16 years and the female lions expect to live about 15-18 years. Due to living in their natural habitat environment, lions tend to be exposed to many great dangers in the wild. “[Lions face threats](http://www.ouramazingplanet.com/994-endangered-african-lions-protection-110302.html) from hunting, habitat loss and diseases that can be spread from domestic dogs in nearby villages, according to the National Zoo.”(Lions: Facts & Information about Lions). Out in the wild, there is no effective medication to help lions when they are sick. However, the life expectancy for lions in the zoo is about 30 years (San Diego Zoo). Due to safety environment in the exhibit, zoo lions are not being exposed to the danger wildlife. Also, zoo lions are provided great medical assistance from the zookeepers.

Overall, both lions in the wild and those kept in the zoos have pros and cons about how, where, and what they do to survive. The lions in the wild are freer to roam around, but less likely to live longer. While, the lions in zoos’ live longer but aren’t as free to roam around. The main issue is how to keep our lions alive no matter where they live. We have to remember that lions and many other animals are going instinct. And, the least we can do, is just to take care of our lions and also make sure that they last long enough for our younger generation to our peers.

**Literature review**

Some people go to the zoo to learn about the animals, while others go to the zoo to relax and relieve stress. Whether one goes to the zoo for the educational value of the experience or for the entertainment value of it, most would remain oblivious to the behind-the-scenes functions of the zoo. Notably, many people do not realize the financial burdens placed on zookeepers and managers. According to the financial reports of the San Diego Zoo, the total revenue in 2010 was $204,285,000, while the expenses were $207,182,000. That left the San Diego Zoo—one of the most well-known zoos in the world—in the red for $2,897,000. The Saipan Zoo is tiny compared to the San Diego Zoo, but its financial woes are the same. Running the zoo has become cost prohibitive, and maintaining and sustaining it remains a daunting task because of the following factors: caring for the animals has become so expensive; the number of exotic animals in the zoo is limited; and the local community fails to engage with the zoo in a meaningful way.

Costs to maintain a zoo continue to rise, and this is the same for the Saipan Zoo. According to Saipan Zoo owner Frank Aldan, feeding more than sixty animals in the zoo could cost them upwards of $150 a day. According to Saipan Tribune newspaper article, the Saipan Zoo is a family owned zoo, and was founded in 1995 when local residents started dropping off and donating animals of all shapes and sizes to the Aldan landscaping company. Every expense such as food for animals came out from the owner’s pocket. The owners are the ones who care of the animals in the zoo. “If you have only five or so visitors a day, it’s not enough and you have to pay out of pocket to meet the zoo’s needs,” Frank Aldan. Tourists pay $15 to enter the zoo, while locals pay $10. If only five people visit the zoo in a day, even if they were five tourists, the zoo would only bring in $75. That is only half of what they need to feed the animals in the zoo, leaving aside the cost of health check-ups for the animal.

To bring more people in to the zoo, the zoo must offer exotic attractions. The Saipan Zoo, however, has only a limited number of exotic animals. Because of this, not many people view a visit to the zoo as something that must be experienced. According to Saipan Tribune newspaper article, the Saipan Zoo only has three big cats: “Lambert” the lion, “Tasha” the tiger, and “Ozzie” the leopard. Of all the animals in the zoo, these three cats seem to provide the greatest attraction. The other exotic animals the Saipan Zoo offers are monkeys, peacocks, a monitor lizard and eighteen other exotic animals, for a total of sixty animals. With limited animals to watch, tourists might not be inclined to visit because those tourists could see these animals back home. According to Saipan Zoo zookeeper, “Some tourists refused to enter the zoo because they think $15 entrance fee is too expensive for them.” Tourists and locals alike need a reason to visit the zoo, but with the limited funds available to the zoo and the lack of visitors, getting more animals is not a realistic goal.

The local community is the best hope to keep the zoo alive. Still, not too many locals patronize the zoo, and the local government has not offered to help the zoo in any meaningful way. Even private organizations have declined to help the zoo, despite the educational value of the zoo. The family that operates the zoo understands how difficult it is. The current economy is such that a visit to the zoo might be a luxury for many families, a luxury that many cannot afford. $10-$15 may be too much for some, and the family who runs the zoo empathizes with the local community.

Zoos can offer a great deal to the community in which it is situated. The zoo can be a valuable place for education, a place where families can spend a few hours learning about the animals housed in the zoo, a place where visitors to our island can see the species unique to our island and our region of the world. The zoo, however, like any other organization, does not run on good feelings or a highly valued mission statement. The zoo needs money to survive, and at this time, the local zoo is finding it more and more difficult to maintain the animals and sustain itself.

**Research questions**

At the beginning of this research project, a lot of data and evidences were collected. Data and evidences such as interviewing of the zookeeper at Saipan Zoo, reading the Academic Journal Articles from Ebsco, and last but not least, disseminating the surveys about the zoo to the peers. These data and evidences were the main help for developing the primary research question, which was “Is the zoo a negative or a positive contribution to the community?. The secondary research question are “What are the negative sides of the zoo?”, “What are the positive sides of the zoo?”.

**Methodology**

Because any form of research requires the collection of data, all students in English 202, section 02 were required to create and disseminate surveys. These surveys would form the basis of their data collection and analysis. Students were required to come up with questions for their surveys. The questions created dealt primarily with the various aspects of the research topic. This paper will explain the survey process.

First, survey questions focused on student’s specific research topic were created. The author of this paper is conducting research on zoos. The question-generating process required students to brainstorm and gather ideas with respect to what kinds of questions would be asked. Students needed to ensure that the questions would inform their research project in meaningful ways. For example, some of the questions on the survey included the following: Have you visited Saipan Zoo?”, “Do you think that it’s wrong to put animals in the zoo and Why?”, “Overall, are you for or against the idea of zoo?” After students had created the questions, they posted them to<http://www.surveymonkey.com>. This website allows students to organize survey questions in multiple ways, and the site helps students distributed the survey to an unlimited number of people via email. Once the survey was ready, all the students were required to take the surveys of their classmates. Because all students were required to complete the surveys, data could be immediately collected and analyzed for the research project.

After the surveys were distributed and the results collected, the next step in the process required each student to analyze the collected results. What follows is the analysis of the results. The vast majority of students who took the surveys indicated that they support the zoo. Roughly about 75% of the students who took the survey agreed that a zoo would make a positive contribution to a community, and they agreed that overall, after weighting all the facts, zoos should not be banned. However, the other 25% of the students who took the survey determined that the presence of a zoo would be negative and that after weighting all the facts, zoos should be banned. Another interesting result was that a high number of students were actually agreed that putting animals in the zoo is a good thing. The survey results show that 88% of the students were very supportive of the idea of putting animals in the zoo.

Overall, creating a survey was not too difficult and the results were outstanding. This survey project was a successful piece that allows students to utilized ability to connect and work with their peers through online. The tools available on the internet to create and disseminate surveys allow for quicker response and almost instant feedback. Moreover, the collected data will form a meaningful port of the overall research projects. At the end, these survey questions that students collected will be a great help later on for the final research paper.

**Findings/ Analysis**

The zoo has been at the center of controversy for over a century. This controversy speaks to the social, education, or entertainment value of the zoo. An overwhelming amount of evidence has been collected proving zoos to be a negative place for animals. Zoos deprive animals of their freedoms; when overpopulated, zoos become a dangerous place for animals; and zoos continue to inject unnecessary drugs into animals for reasons that have nothing to do with animal health.

Some zoos have programs that help save endangered species by raising and breeding these animals at the zoo. Many “animals like the bald eagle, the California condor, and the American gray wolf had been saved by the zoo under the U.S. Endangered Species Act” (AllAboutWildLife.com). However, when these animals are returned to the wild, their chances at survival are minimal because they would not have learned the proper survival skills that they would have otherwise gained in the wild. Therefore, zoos give a false idea about how cared for these animals are when the basic mode of caring—keeping them locked up and confined—is actually hurting them. Animals are accustomed to being fed by zookeepers at certain times. These animals would never have a chance to utilize their natural hunting skills due to their confinement and use as entertainment.

In some cases, overpopulated zoos must deal with a surplus of animals. According to Carole Baskin, a founder and CEO of Big Cat Rescue, surplus animals seem to be one of the problems that zoo faces. Zoos breed animals for conservation purposes under their Species Survival Plans (SSPs). Under SSP, zoos produce extra, or surplus, animals for which the zoo often does not have the room or resources (Tampa Cats Examiner). To alleviate overpopulation, the surplus animals are returned to the wild, while others are sold into the illegal animal trade. Still others are unfortunate enough to be killed.

Animals are wired to live in areas around the world where vast lands are available for them, where they can live and roam freely. When animals are confined to an area where they only have a few square feet, they are forced to wander in circles every day. Animals, just like humans, can get depressed or suffer from illness due to boredom. Zoos, however, remain more concerned about how animals interact with a human audience, so they cannot afford to have a depressed animal. Sad animals will not bring patrons in, and without visitors to the zoo, the monies necessary to pay for utilities and for animal upkeep will dwindle. To prevent this depression, zookeepers inject drugs into the animals, so that the animals will maintain a positive attitude and put on a good show for the human audiences. Keeping animals tame and calm is another reason zoos medicate animals: “The zoo's zebras were given an anti-psychotic drug that is used to treat schizophrenia in humans when the zebras were being moved into the zoo's new Africa exhibit. That's because zebras will chase anything new or unfamiliar in their environment, said Wynona Shellabarger, the zoo's veterinarian” (“Zoos Prescribe Drugs to Anxious Animals”).

In conclusion, zoos seem to play a big part in society. Zoos allow humans to safely interact with animals that they would not otherwise see up close. Humans are given a glimpse into how animals react and how they live amongst one another. What people do not consider is what an animal is deprived of by its confinement in a zoo until they are informed about it. Because zoos remain solvent through financial support of its patrons, zoo owners and managers must make the zoo as safe and as friendly as possible. The negative contributions of zoos, as this paper has shown, far outweigh any positive contributions a zoo might make. Therefore, as long as zoos exist, animals will continue to live under siege.

**Discussions**

The overall goals for this paper were to exploit both sides of the subject of zoo. It was important to understand a question about whether “Is the zoo a negative or a positive contribution to the community?” By composing this piece of work, it required lots of attentive hard work and dedication. This project was significant in many ways. One way is allowing the audience to have an in-depth understanding of both negative and positive facts about zoos. Before people are informed about the zoos, one might have the wrong perceptions of what the zoo really about. This paper was to help the audience comprehend the facts without being biased. One primary reason for this project would be helping to finds the answers to the primary question, which was “Is the zoo a negative or a positive contribution to the community”. The answers for this question were unbiased. Many methods were used to assist in this project. Tools such as data and surveys were significantly helpful towards the outcome of this project. The dissemination for the surveys was quite successful. The peers from EN202 class were the one who took the first surveys. Then the EN101 classes were the one who took the final surveys. On the final look of this project, there are a lot of room for improvements and suggestions. One thing that could have been done differently for this project is to have an interview with more experts in the field. The successful things about this project were the zoo visiting at Saipan Zoo. In the zoo visit, the writer was manages to get many useful information such got a closer look at the animal and conducted an interview with the zookeeper. The unsuccessful thing about this project is lacking of others zoo experts’ opinion. Managing the time for this project was quite challenging. Lacking time and preparations was something the author encounter. Overall, this project was quite successful based on the reflections and outcomes of this project.

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Appendix

1. How many times have you visited Saipan Zoo?

* Never
* More than once
* Once
* Once
* Once
* More than once
* More than once
* Once
* More than once
* Once
* Never
* More than once
* Once
* Never

1. According to your opinion, what do you think it’s good about the zoo?

* You can learn different thing about the animals there
* We get to see animals that we would’ve never seen.
* It has a vanity of animals from around the world. Also, I enjoy watching the way they treat the animals.
* They take care of the animals
* We get to learn about different animals
* It’s a place where not only children but even adults get to learn about these different animals
* The animals
* It makes money and the animals are taken care of
* Some zoos are the only way that people can experience nature and also are the only way some animals such as those orphaned at birth or born in captivity can survive. Zoos have also been helpful with breeding programs that can keep an endangered species going.
* A zoo allows the people to learn about the animals in an upfront kind of way
* They feed animals, keep them hydrated, and provide them shelter
* The income, the education. The experience and knowledge you receive form the animals itself.
* We can observe animals for education purposes
* It has exotic animals that are not foreign to our island
* In Saipan helping make money and feed them right.

1. In your opinion, what do you think it’s bad about the zoo?

* I don’t know
* Nothing
* None
* They keep the animals away from their natural habitat
* The animals could escape and harm the lives of the people and the animals would probably want to be in the forest or jungle or whatever they were from.
* Nothing
* I do not know
* Sometimes it is unsanitary
* Some zoo do not get government funding or enough visitors and are not able to or do not keep up the facilities and health care to the proper standard for the animals
* Bad because the animals are limited to do the things they’re supposed to do
* They deprive an animal of their freedom. They don’t run in the wild or practice their hunting skills.
* Holding animals in different habitats.
* They lock the animals up in a cage, taking their freedom
* It stinks. And it may seem unsanitary as a place to house animals.
* No freedom of the animals.

1. Overall, are you FOR or AGAINST the idea of the zoo?

* For
* For
* For
* Against
* Against
* For
* For
* For
* For
* For
* For
* For
* For
* For
* Against