

Student

Student 1

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Ms. Kelm

Rogerian Sample Essay

Is Animal Conservation in Zoos a Chimera?

Today, both scientists and civilians are concerned about the ongoing decrease in certain wild animal populations. We continue to lose species on a daily basis and, unfortunately, these are eternal, irremediable losses. Along with different organizations that have stepped up to address this issue, zoos are getting more involved with conservation efforts. However, the question is: how effective is holding wild animals captive in places like the zoo towards conservation? In their article “Zoos Have Yet to Unveil their Full Conservation Potential,” J.E Fa et al. bring up valid points supporting the idea that zoos are not making large enough efforts towards conservation, and thus are not very effective. Michael Hutchins, Brandie Smith, and Ruth Allard contradict this idea in their article “In Defense of Zoos and Aquariums: the Ethical Basis for Keeping Wild Animals in Captivity” by going into depth about how zoos are constantly striving to save endangered species. Ultimately both sets of authors understand the gravity of the animal endangerment issue we face today and want to contribute to the rescue of as many species as possible.

In the article “Zoos Have Yet to Unveil their Full Conservation Potential,” Fa et al. hold that animal captivity in zoos is not as effective as the organizations may guarantee. The authors believe zoos are “affected by anthropocentric factors” such as the “preference for the conservation of more ‘charismatic’ species” and the “imperative of making money over funding conservation activities by the institution” (Fa et al. 97). They argue that the zoo is worried about

many other things in addition to conservation. In order to survive, zoos have to appease the public that visits them. Yet, by choosing to hold more “charismatic” animals such as bears or tigers, zoos are housing “species of lesser conservation priority” and, therefore, should decide to hold “more threatened species [, like amphibians, if they] are to make a veritable contribution to species conservation” (Fa et al. 98). Further, the authors’ argument that zoos struggle to balance “conservation projects and animals’ biological needs [...] against [their] financial and public relations imperative” is their strongest support for the idea that zoos lack effectiveness in conservation (Fa et al. 98). Along with being organizations concerned for the needs of animals, zoos are also businesses and have to pay attention the amount of income and visits they receive, which could steal some focus from conservation. Fa et al.’s point is valid under the conditions of zoos that are smaller, less interested in conservation, or simply not certified as a conservation-based institution. Since these zoos would be more concerned about making money to improve their facilities, they would not be making conservation efforts as big as Fa et al. would expect them to.

On the other hand, the authors of “In Defense of Zoos and Aquariums: the Ethical Basis for Keeping Wild Animals in Captivity,” Hutchins, Smith, and Allard, argue that there are two types of zoos in the US: ones that are accredited by the AZA (American Zoo and Aquarium Association) and ones that are not (Hutchins, Smith, and Allard 958). Those that are accredited by the AZA have a special focus on conservation issues and these are the ones the authors defend. AZA accredited zoos value the rescuing of endangered animals and make great efforts to reverse the damage we as humans have caused on many of their populations. They are committed to recovery, reintroduction, habitat restoration, scientific research, conservation

education, support of protected areas, animal welfare and much more. They understand that there are “many species in need of help, [but] zoo [...] efforts are often focused on flagship species [because they] have the ability to capture the public’s attention and help preserve habitat and other taxa” (Hutchins, Smith, and Allard 960). It is hoped that endangered charismatic animals encourage visitors to become interested in conservation of all other animals. Further, the authors continue to insist that “some species [...] cannot persist without human intervention” and provide different examples of animals currently being helped in various zoos across the States (960). The strongest support for their belief that AZA accredited zoos do much for conservation is seen by the explanation of how research, development of technologies, conservation education and emphasis on welfare are of great contribution toward the rescuing of endangered species (Hutchins, Smith, and Allard 961-963). Advancements in each of these areas have contributed to successful results in conservation, such as the protection of the Sumatran tiger in Minnesota Zoos and the Jamaican iguana in the Fort Worth Zoos (Hutchins, Smith, and Allard 960). Regardless, their argument is most valid where only AZA accredited zoos are concerned, for even the authors state that they are not speaking for any other zoo (Hutchins, Smith, and Allard 958).

Both articles present valid ideas and important facts to consider. Despite their differences, both sets of authors see the importance of the conservation of endangered animals and understand that keeping certain animals captive in zoos can be effective. They know how dangerous the situation currently is for many wild populations and how much worse it could possibly get. Therefore, they all believe conservation should be a key focus for zoos and that many species are in need of human intervention. All of the authors are educated in biology and in

zoology so they are all aware of what is best for these animals. Ultimately, these people care about the environment and believe in the importance of wild animals in our lives.

Seeing that the authors all share some common beliefs, compromise is possible but may be difficult. Clearly, conservation of endangered species is considered vital in both articles. However, Fa et al. may expect too much from the zoo. As they stated, the zoo is after all a business and has business-related concerns as well. However, it would be fair of them to notice the efforts zoos make that Hutchins, Smith, and Allard mention in their own article. Nonetheless, there is always room for growth and zoos can continue to improve their conservation efforts. Both sets of authors would be appeased if zoos, especially those that are not accredited by the AZA, were encouraged to increase their emphasis on conservation and represent other more endangered species like amphibians and fish. Further, since conservation can be expensive, Fa et al. and their supporters should understand that zoos need not to disregard their financial endeavors and could even support zoos fundraising efforts. Hutchins, Smith, Allard, and Fa et al. want the same thing – to rescue and restore wild animals that have suffered mainly because of us. This shared passion should be strong enough to make compromise a possibility.

Works Cited

- Fa, J.e, M. Gusset, N. Flesness, and D.A. Conde. "Zoos Have Yet to Unveil Their Full Conservation Potential." *Animal Conservation*. 17.2 (2014): 97-100. Web. 20 Mar. 2016.
- Hutchins, Michael, Brandie Smith, and Ruth Allard. "In Defense of Zoos and Aquariums: the Ethical Basis for Keeping Wild Animals in Captivity." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. 223.7 (2003): 958-966. Web. 27 Feb. 2016.