

Issue Overview: Should we have zoos?

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Newborn lion and tiger cubs are seen at Qingdao Zoo in China. Zoos have been at the center of debates about conservation and animal ethics. Photo: Feature China/Barcroft Media via Getty Images.

Panamanian golden frogs are an important symbol in Panama. Panama is a country in Central America.

There are probably no more golden frogs in Panama, though. The tiny yellow creatures disappeared around 10 years ago. This happened after a fungus spread.



Many zoos in the United States have them, though. Zoos have been raising the frogs for years. They planned to return them to the forests in Panama one day.

Things have changed in Panama. Many of the trees in the forests have been cut down. The frogs probably would not survive in the wild. Should the zoos still raise them?

It is one of many questions about zoos. People wonder if zoos are a good thing. Some are not sure if we should have them.

What Is Conservation?

Conservation is work done to protect and save animals. Many zoos say they do important conservation work.

There are two kinds of conservation. "In-situ" conservation is protecting animals in their natural habitats. An example is making a place in Africa to help elephants. Some people believe that in-situ conservation is best for animals.

The other kind of conservation is called "ex-situ" conservation. It is when animals are protected outside their natural homes. That is what zoos are known for. The golden frog project is an example.

Zoos are involved in both kinds of conservation. Many zoos support conservation projects around the world. The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) runs the Bronx Zoo. It is in New York City. WCS runs other zoos, too. The WCS works in nearly 50 countries. It does many different things to help animals around the world. One example is helping countries make laws to protect animals.

What Are The Main Arguments Supporting Zoos?

Many zoos have programs to teach people about wildlife and biodiversity. The San Diego Zoo is in California. It offers camps, classes and sleepovers, for example.

Some people say these programs are important. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) oversees zoos in the United States. It says that zoo education programs help visitors feel connected to nature. This can make them want to help.



People who support zoos believe that most zoos treat animals well. In recent years, many zoos have made new spaces for their animals. They are designed to look more like the animal's natural habitat. They also give the animals more things to do, like climb trees or swing on ropes.

People will always keep wild animals, some say. If that is the case, a zoo is the best place for them.

It is very rare for zoos to release animals back into the wild. They did this with the red wolf in the U.S., though. There were almost none left. An AZA program helped.

Many zoos rescue animals from bad treatment. In 2002, U.S. police took six polar bears from a circus. It was in Puerto Rico. The bears had not been fed much. They were left in very hot temperatures. The bears were moved to zoos in the United States. Their names were Alaska, Royal, Willy, Masha, Boris and Kenny. Once in the zoos, the polar bears got better.

What Are The Main Arguments Against Zoos?

Some people do not like that zoos use animals for people's enjoyment. Zoos became popular in the 1800s. Zoo animals were not treated well back then.

Also, a lot of people think that zoo animals still suffer. The Captive Animals' Protection Society (CAPS) is in the United Kingdom. It says animals' needs cannot be met in zoos.

In the United States, the AZA plays an important role in making sure zoos take good care of their animals. But not every country has something like this. Also, zoos may not follow the rules. Liz Tyson is the leader of CAPS. She said laws to protect zoo animals have not worked well.

Many people think keeping wild animals in captivity is wrong. It does not matter how nice the zoo is.

Conclusion

It does not seem as if zoos are going away. The talk about them will continue, though. Changes have happened in many zoos as a result.

Many people feel joy when they see an animal up close. It can be sad to see a wild animal where it does not belong, though.

Quiz

- 1 Read the section "What Are The Main Arguments Supporting Zoos?"
Which answer choice correctly explains a reason WHY some people support zoos?
 - (A) Zoos release animals back into the wild all the time.
 - (B) Zoos can make people care about nature and animals.
 - (C) Animal homes in zoos are usually much nicer than in the wild.
 - (D) Animals outside of zoos are always treated badly and need to be rescued.

- 2 Read the section "What Are The Main Arguments Against Zoos?"
Which answer choice correctly explains a viewpoint of people who are AGAINST zoos?
 - (A) There are no laws to protect zoo animals anywhere.
 - (B) CAPS in the United Kingdom cannot meet animals' needs.
 - (C) Some zoos do not follow the rules or take care of animals well.
 - (D) It is only OK to keep wild animals in cages if they provide people with entertainment.

- 3 Read the section "What Is Conservation?"
What is the BEST way to explain "conservation"?
 - (A) Conservation means putting animals in zoos.
 - (B) Conservation means leaving animals alone.
 - (C) Conservation means any effort to protect animals from harm.
 - (D) Conservation means any effort to use animals to teach people about nature.

- 4 Read the selection from the section "What Are The Main Arguments Supporting Zoos?"

In recent years, many zoos have made new spaces for their animals. They are designed to look more like the animal's natural habitat. They also give the animals more things to do, like climb trees or swing on ropes.

In this selection, what does "habitat" mean?

- (A) home
- (B) cage
- (C) building
- (D) entertainment