

No More Cages: Deep Green Bush-School Statement on Zoos and Aquariums

The Deep Green Bush-School curriculum is opposed to zoos and aquariums* and therefore the school will not take students to zoos or aquariums as a field trip. The DGBS recommends that parents also not to take children to the zoo. This document highlights how zoos and aquariums contradict and undermine efforts towards a healthy culture and a healthy world.

First of all, we can ask ourselves, would WE want to be kidnapped from our family, taken far away and locked up for our entire lives, to be stared at, photographed, harrassed and teased daily by thousands of people? Of course not. Yet that is what we subject animals to in a zoo or aquarium.

The fact is, a zoo is a miserable place for animals. They are not in their natural habitat, they are stressed by humans visitors and stressed by crowding. They never have enough of their own species to interact with – and more important, they do not have their families or herds or packs that they would normally be living with. All animals are social, even animals we normally don't think of as social (Bradshaw 2017) – even trees and plants are social. (Fleming 2014, Simard 2016, Wohlleben 2015) Yet in zoos they are all locked up, often alone.

One of the most painful, abusive and torturous aspects of zoos is that the animals are ripped apart from their families and friends, or prevented from forming healthy social relations as they naturally would do. In Auckland, there are two completely unrelated Asian elephants, whereas elephants normally live in matriarchal herds based on family relations. Orcas and dolphins live in pods. Wolves live in packs. And so on. Denied these natural social arrangements, the animals are stressed, painfully alone and depressed. Many zoo animals are given anti-depressant medication. (Smith 2014) It's like living in prison, or worse, in solitary confinement, or a concentration camp. It's no wonder why captive animals regularly try to escape or fight back or kill their oppressors. (Hribal 2011)

On top of that, no zoo can possibly provide the natural amount of space an animal would have in the wild. Tigers and lions have around 18,000 times less space in zoos than they would in the wild. Polar bears have *one million times* less space. (CAPS 2006) Orcas and dolphins travel the ocean. Being in a zoo is torture for them.

The result of the torturous environment of a zoo is mental illness and trauma. Most animals in zoos suffer from anxiety and mental illness and show associated behavioural problems, such as pacing, rocking, circling, shuffling, self-mutilation, obsessive grooming, and hyper-aggression (Just like kids stuck in a classroom.)

One of the results of the torturous zoo environment is that animals don't live as long in zoos. Just as human diseases increased once humans started living crowded together in cities, animals forced to live crowded with other animals in zoos are exposed to a wider range of diseases than in the wild. According to a report by the Captive Animal Protection Society (now called Freedom for Animals), African elephants in the wild live more than three times as long as those kept in zoos. 40% of lion cubs in zoos die before one month of age. (CAPS 2006)

Other highlights of the CAPS report include:

- Zoos regularly kill “surplus” animals. Between 7,500 and 200,000 animals in European zoos are considered ‘surplus’ at any one time. The European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) said in 2007 that zoos were encouraged to kill the animals they don't want, including tigers.

- Most zoo animals – 70-80% of them – are still taken from the wild. Often the mothers are killed first and then the young are taken.

The fact is, what you see in a zoo *is not actually the animal*. An animal can only be understood in the wild. An elephant in the zoo is not an elephant, unless it is surrounded by its matriarchal herd, and it is not an elephant unless it is living in the place it evolved to live, the place it is rooted to, with all the trees, other animals and climate that shape how they live and who they are. An orca is only an orca with its pod in the ocean, swimming with all the other creatures of the oceans. A wolf is only a wolf in the wild where it has always been, with all the other animals it would interact with, such as caribou and deer.

Furthermore, all the different aspects of an animal's intelligence, including social and emotional intelligence, as well as their entire culture, only develops in the wild, surrounded by the other members of its familial group from which young animals learn how to live, to all the other animals, plants, trees, rocks, weather, and countless other stimuli, to which the animal is constantly responding to. Thus, defense of zoos reflects a *total ignorance of and disregard for ecology* – that everything is connected, and an animal in a zoo is not the animal.

Zoos objectify animals. Zoos make animals a *thing* to be used for our entertainment or for scientific research, not as equals, not recognising they have their own desires for how to live their lives. The only way to treat animals in such a way is to think of them as objects – unthinking, unfeeling, undeserving of respect.

Zoos reflect humanism and human superiority, which is a belief inherent in civilisations, when humans live disconnected from the wild. It is a source of all destruction of the wild. Humanism/human superiority refers to the common belief that humans are superior to all other life forms, and thus we are able to do whatever we wish, with any other creature. (Jensen 2016) In fact, zoos only arose with civilisation, the first zoos being created 5000 years ago. (Jensen 2007) It is this kind of thinking which is why most wildlife is now gone, and 96% of all mammals, by weight, are humans and their livestock. (Carrington 2018) Half of all wildlife has been wiped out in just the last 40 years. (WWF 2018) Zoos are a reflection of human idiocy and cruelty.

Zoos claim to aid the cause of conservation. This is part of their PR and greenwashing. Most zoos do not engage in conservation, many animals will not breed in captivity, genetic diversity is unnaturally low, and most animals that are bred in zoos are *kept* in zoos or other forms of captivity. (CAPS 2006, Jamieson 1985) Furthermore, the whole notion of “conservation” comes from the humanist/human superiority ideology, in which humans determine that some areas will be *for humans only* – i.e., cities, which are effectively *death zones*, from which all of nature has been eradicated – and some areas will be for wildlife and “wilderness”. Conservation is the belief that little pockets of wildlife can thrive while surrounded by ever-growing death zones of human cities, spewing toxic waste, radioactive waste and endless rubbish. The belief in conservation is well-meaning but ultimately a reflection of total ecological ignorance. (Livingston 1991)

Many zoos portray themselves as helping to “educate” youth and the public. It's true, they do. Zoos do an excellent job teaching:

- Zoos teach that humans are superior to the rest of nature.
- Zoos teach that only humans do not like to be locked up (and even then, some humans still lock up millions of other humans – in prisons and classrooms, for example).
- Zoos teach that animals have no thoughts or feelings.
- Zoos teach that humans can do whatever they want to nature.

- Zoos teach that nature exists for our entertainment.
- Zoos teach that our current way of life is acceptable.
- Zoos teach our children to be cruel.

Let us remember that for more than two million years, humans did not create zoos and did not view themselves as superior to other creatures. Humans evolved living among wild animals, treating them with respect and viewing them as kin. Humans regarded all of the natural world as sacred. As Luther Standing Bear of the Lakota explained,

Kinship with all the creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them and so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue.

The old Lakota was wise. He knew that man's heart away from nature becomes hard; he knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too. So he kept his youth close to its softening influence. (McLuhan1971)

This reflects a fundamental element of the Deep Green Bush-School curriculum. In the end, the best way to help animals is to leave them alone and to make every effort to stop this civilisation from destroying all of life on the planet.

What to do instead of going to the zoo:

- Allow your child freedom in any natural setting, to explore the trees, plants, bugs, birds and other animals
- Take your child camping and hiking
- Role model respect for the natural world. For example:
 - only taking dead wood
 - thanking trees, plants, and animals when you use or eat them
 - talking to the trees and animals
- Give kids books about nature and that contain photos of animals
- Read to them from books about wildlife and nature
- Explain to them why you're not going to the zoo

** The focus here is on zoos and aquariums. But the points made also apply to other forms of abusive animal captivity such as circuses, rodeos, factory farms and any form of animal experimentation and vivisection.*

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