

Reading



Behind Bars at the Zoo

Track 13

1 It was in 1826 that the Zoological Society **was founded** in London. In 1867,
the title was shortened to *zoo*. Later on, in 1892, the Englishman Henry Salt, in
his book *Animal Rights*, was one of the first to protest against keeping animals in
cages. He did not like the idea because of the way the animals were **confined**
5 and also the way animals in zoos “lose their character.” Since then, many
people have criticized zoos for these reasons. However, zoos claim that their
role is to educate the public and **conserve** animals. These aims are not bad in
themselves. It is the way in which they are carried out that we must consider.

Zoos claim that they have an important educational function. Is this true?
10 In reality, most people go to zoos for entertainment. This is what sells the tickets
and pays the bills. Zoos say they give people the opportunity to see the wonders
of nature and its wild animals. In fact, they are showing us animals that have
lost their **dignity**: animals with sad and empty eyes. The conditions under
which animals are kept in zoos change their behavior. Animals, like humans,
15 are affected by their environment. After months and years in a cage without any
interest, animals begin to lose their natural characteristics. Many animals in zoos
get signs of “zoochosis,” abnormal behavior which includes endlessly **pacing**
up and down and rocking from side to side. It is caused by lack of space, lack
of interest, lack of company, and an unsuitable diet. Two polar bears in Bristol
20 Zoo in England have been confined in a small area for 28 years and show all the
signs of zoochosis. How can people observe wild animals under such conditions
and believe that they are being educated? To learn about wild animals, one must
observe them in the wild where they live.

Zoos also claim that they are conserving **endangered species** in the hope
25 of returning them to the wild in the future. Out of about 10,000 zoos that exist
around the world, only about 500 register their animals with an international
species **database**, and only about 5 or 10 percent of these zoos actually work
with endangered species.

Zoos have projects where they breed animals in zoos for the purpose of
30 conservation. However, most animals do not need help in breeding; they

have been doing it for a long time without any help. Animals have been endangered because their natural surroundings have been destroyed by humans. It is true that zoos have had several success stories with zoo-bred animals. One was the golden lion tamarin, a species of monkey that had almost become **extinct** because humans destroyed its natural habitat and too many were captured for pets and zoos. Over 100 tamarins were bred in zoos, and when they were released into the wild, only 30 survived. Some were unable to live life in the wild—they were not able to climb trees, or when they did, they fell off; some did not even move; some were not used to a natural diet. It is a risky business to reintroduce zoo-bred animals to the wild, because if they have lost their **instinct** for survival and cannot **adapt** quickly enough, they will die.

In conclusion, it seems that zoos are trying to fulfill their goals to educate and conserve but in the process are harming the animals themselves. What is the solution, then? One solution is to protect the natural homes or habitats of animals. Another possibility is to have habitat preserves where wild animals live with the least possible human interference. If the money and expertise that zoos are using today were redirected to habitat preservation and management, we would not have the problems of having to conserve species whose natural homes have disappeared. Nonetheless, there also has to be an international effort to control pollution and the illegal capturing of endangered species.