

The reality of zoos

The term 'zoo' was not used until the early 1800s when the Zoological Society of London was founded. At the end of World War II, the UK had only fourteen zoos, but the late fifties and early sixties saw the number of zoos rise, reaching about 250 by the 1980s. Today zoos are a relic of a bygone age; a Victorian concept which, as our knowledge of the animal kingdom grows, becomes even less palatable.

To most people, it is self evident that keeping a rhinoceros in a small concrete enclosure in central London is hardly appropriate. So zoos claim they are on a greater mission: for conservation, education, research, and entertainment. Zoos now favour terms like wildlife park or even 'sanctuary'.

In a survey, undertaken by the World Society for the Protection of Animals, 80% of those questioned were concerned about the welfare of animals in zoos, three quarters believed that the alternative for many species was extinction. Over half said they would not visit a zoo if they knew that it had little impact on conservation. Yet zoos haven't really changed from the menageries of old.

The Captive Animals' Protection Society is totally opposed to the incarceration of animals for entertainment and believes that zoos do not educate, but misinform, and further, divert funds from positive conservation. Animals remain threatened or are even driven to extinction, whilst precious resources are drained away on expensive, high profile breeding projects with no serious hope of success.

<http://www.captiveanimals.org/zoos/zse1.htm>