

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Zoos

Zoos: Prisons or sanctuaries?

In 1867, a popular entertainer sang, "Walking in the zoo is the OK thing to do", but a hundred years later, this view was widely disputed. Now there is growing controversy over keeping wild animals in zoos.

1. Cruel confinement?

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE that depriving wild animals of their natural freedom is cruel. They see zoos as prisons where animals suffer from stress, frustration and boredom. Other people argue, however, that wild animals are not free, even in their natural environment. They live in defined areas, where they face constant danger from hostile



neighbours and humans. Far from restricting freedom, zoos provide sanctuaries in which animals can live and breed in peace.

"In every good zoo, the animal does not feel a prisoner," says Professor Hedinger of Zurich Zoo. "As in the wild, it is more like a tenant, or owner of a piece of land."

But not all zoos are good zoos, it seems. There are many complaints about standards of safety and care in both zoos and safari parks. Stephen Ormorod, of the RSPCA, says that, "Many zoo owners are ignorant of their animals needs."

Larger zoos argue that every effort is made to meet the animals' needs: they enjoy a regular, well-balanced diet, constant shelter and are safe from predators.

2. Educational role?

ZOOS AND SAFARI PARKS are often accused of using animals for amusement and for profit. But many people insist that good zoos provide much more than entertainment. They offer a unique opportunity to learn about wildlife and visitors can study animals at closer range. Opponents, however, question the educational values of zoos, where animals are seen as dependant on humans.



3. Saving endangered species?

MANY ANIMALS are in danger of extinction in their natural habitat, and zoos say that the animals they breed in captivity can be released back to the wild. However, critics argue that so far only five species have been saved from extinction in this way.

(adapted from 'Zoos- prisons or sanctuaries?' from Debates- The Use and Abuse of animals by Zoe Watson)

