Zoos - Heaven or Hell?

As animals' rights becomes more prevalent, the conditions within many zoos have improved over the years. Zoos include aquariums, safari parks and indeed any institutions which house animals for display. Many people argue that zoos imprison animals by removing them from their natural environment, where their liberty is taken away. Despite this, zoos are becoming increasingly popular places to visit, where families pay high entrance fees for a good day out. Is it fair for animals to live in enclosures for the benefit of humans? Is this place a heaven or a hell? This report will investigate the pros and cons of zoos.

Some people believe that zoos are educational - they teach children about many, often endangered animals that they would rarely get to see in the wild. For instance, it would be very difficult to see a tiger in the wild - to see it in front of your very eyes. At the local zoo, one could get really close and experience it first-hand. As a result, people learn about a variety of animals, how to care for them, what they eat and need to survive and how to appreciate their beauty. Other people, however, may argue that animals should be in their natural environment - where we can learn about their natural behaviours since they have freedom and liberty - as opposed to being an object for humans to stare at in a man-made prison.

Taking animals from the wild, seizing them from their homes may be considered inhumane by some. On one hand, strong bonds are formed with their families/packs/herds and removing them from the wild can create stress, depression and anxiety for the animals concerned. Who gives humans the right to do this? On the other hand, however, some animals are on the brink of extinction, and by raising them in captivity, where they can be cared for and protected from predators, poachers and natural disasters such as starvation or global warming, extinction can be prevented. In zoos, there are many breeding programmes designed to prevent extinction and in doing so protecting the longevity of the species. Many would argue that if animals are born in zoos (bred in captivity) then they would not miss being in the wild as they would know no different. Some would state, however, that an animal should not be enclosed in a metal cage but should roam freely, away from humans, who are often the main predator, after all.

Whilst most zoos ensure that animals' welfare is of paramount importance - ensuring their needs are met by providing enriching environments - many, nevertheless, do not provide engaging, stimulating habitats and so animals become bored, disengaged and depressed: they may be entrapped in small cages with no room to exercise; people flash their cameras; children bang on the glass or bars; food is thrown at them so there is no hunting survival instinct - surely this is wrong? As a result, zoos often get tarred with the same brush - branded as horrific places that should be banned. Contrary to popular belief, however, and if zoos are accredited by the AZA, where there are strict rules and standards for animal welfare, zoos can be wonderfully stimulating places where animals thrive.

No-one can deny that many zoos do not provide a good home for animals. They can be prison-like places, only interested in making money for the owner, where animals may display disturbing behaviours due to boredom and lack of stimulation. Additionally, these places are not educational as we do not see the animals in their natural environment nor do we witness natural behaviours to learn from. Such places are indeed a hell for the animals concerned. Many zoos, however, do provide a good home for their inhabitants, especially those who may need rehabilitation when injured in the wild. It can be argued, that without rehabilitation, many animals would otherwise suffer and die without zoos intervening and offering their help.

To conclude, it is evident that there are many reasons in favour of zoos and many, consequently, demanding that they be monitored and inspected immediately to ensure that they comply with standards to keep all animals safe, looked-after and nurtured. On balance, I believe zoos are good places if they put the needs and welfare of animals before money.

Firstly, I believe that zoos are fabulous places for children to learn how to protect the world and its inhabitants through educational programmes.

Secondly, without zoos, many species would become extinct.

Thirdly, with investment, zoos can replicate the natural habitats of deserts, forests, grasslands, savannahs, rainforests and jungles - so animals can thrive. The ocean, however, is quite different – it is too vast and animals should not, in my opinion, be housed in tanks! I feel that with accreditation and a system where all zoos should be regulated, zoos can be 'heaven-like' places for many animals rather than the 'hellish' places that do unfortunately exist today, especially in poorer parts of the world where zoos are not regulated at all. The governments all over the world should now act to accredit all institutes where animals are on display thus keeping our animals safe...so we can enjoy them...and not at their expense or misery. Furthermore, I strongly suggest that humans stop destroying the natural homes of animals so that the threat of extinction disappears altogether, and then, there will be no need for zoos in the first place. Earth belongs to everyone. Perhaps in the future, the human race will feel regret, shame and sorrow for the way in which we treated our animals – especially those made extinct by our selfish, greedy behaviour.