

## ELEPHANTS DO NOT BELONG IN ZOOS

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### Introduction

Zoos are becoming less attractive to customers because the demand for animal performances and exploitation is decreasing, according to the director of the welfare organisation Animal Asia. This is despite the fact that the demand for animal exploitation is exaggerated by those who provide it.

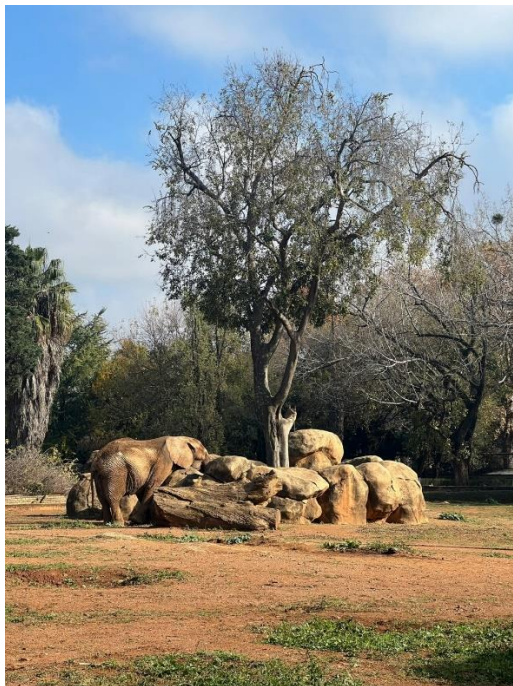
Zoos are increasingly searching for alternative revenue streams. For example, the [Pretoria Zoo](#) hosts public parties, [festivals and after-hours](#) events which often feature live music, DJ line-ups and alcohol.

The administrators and advisors of the Pretoria Zoo continue to [justify](#) the captivity of elephants for [conservation](#) purposes. However, this argument is questionable as there are already large populations of elephants living in natural environments in South Africa.

Public conservation education is a requirement for membership in [professional](#) zoo associations. However, in recent years, zoos have been criticized for failing to educate the public on conservation issues and related biological concepts.

### Background of the development of the Modern Zoo

[Carl Hagenbeck](#) was a prominent animal trader animal and ethnographic showman in the 19th century. He was known for his enormously [popular displays](#) of humans, animals and artefacts gathered from all over the world, and he supplied many European zoos with wild exotic animals. In 1907, he created the first modern zoo: a zoo featuring wild animal enclosures that were designed without any bars.



National Zoological Gardens, Pretoria, South Africa ©PREN

The [Hagenbeck revolution, as it was known](#), included enclosures using moats and artfully arranged rock displays to discreetly confine animals. In this manner, Hagenbeck attempted to artfully disguise their captivity and in doing so created the [illusion](#) that the animals on display were living in a natural environment.

[David Hancocks](#), a well renowned British zoo director, architect and consultant, envisioned and oversaw the creation of a revolutionary gorilla exhibit in 1976 which featured amongst other, mature trees and an abundance of natural foliage at the Woodland Park Zoo. David Hancocks has subsequently become an outspoken critic of zoos and similar institutions. In [an interview](#), commenting on zoo architecture and enrichment he concluded:

*“The exhibits today may now look more natural, but in terms of animal needs they are typically not much better than the old menagerie cages (which, incidentally, still remain in every detail in many holding facilities and off-exhibit zoo areas). Concrete trees, vegetation that is sealed off by electric wires, acres of fake rockwork that does not feel or act like real rocks in its thermal capacities, substrates that just get packed down harder and harder, are never tilled and become like concrete. A few dead trees perhaps, that are dried up and hard as iron, and just as useless to the animal occupants. More disturbingly, nothing ever changes in these useless zoo spaces. Zoo animals step out into the very same unchanged space every morning day after day after year after year”.*

And also:

*“The zoo passion today for ‘enrichment’ is, to me, a public admission of defeat. In a space that gives the animals what they truly require there is no need to litter the place with junk and other distractions. Animals in the wild don’t require ‘enrichment’. They have agency and can choose to interact with the living components of their natural habitats (physical, living and social). They are able to engage the repertoire of behaviours that they evolved for use within their natural habitat and to do so without being artificially enticed to mimic a few aspects of those behaviours by a keeper. Animals in the wild do not require a keeper’s stimulation to be active; they have places worth exploring and have their natural, social mix of compatriots, and that is a sufficient stimulus for them to be active. They can dig, fly, run, climb, soar and do all manner of natural things denied to most animals in most zoos”.*

### **The Aspirations of the Modern Zoo**

Zoos often claim that they provide an educational day out for the general public by offering an entertaining way to learn about animals and conservation. This argument is frequently used by those who support keeping animals in captivity for profit. However, unbiased [research](#) published in the academic journal [Conservation Biology](#) suggests that this claim is false and that children are not actually educated when visiting zoos.

Research conducted surveyed 2800 children after guided and unguided visits to the London Zoo. This survey revealed that 62% of children showed no change in knowledge regarding new facts about animals or any pertaining to environmental conversation.

Modern zoos and aquariums also aspire to contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation research. This is a key criterion for accreditation by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For instance, the Pretoria Zoo is a member of PAAZA, and [PAAZA](#) is a member of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.



The National Zoological Gardens, Pretoria, South Africa ©PREN

On 16 November 2022, Professor Martinette Kruger and Adam Viljoen [published a paper](#) titled “*Encouraging Pro-Conservation Intentions in Urban Recreational Spaces: A South African Zoo Perspective*”. The paper is supported by a field survey carried out at the Johannesburg Zoo in 2019 and 445 completed questionnaires. The paper argues that zoos have an important role to play in preserving rare and endangered species of animals, which in turn helps to preserve biodiversity and natural ecosystems around the world.

Zoos consistently rebrand themselves as serious contributors to conservation. The argument that is most commonly used is that zoo animals function as backup populations for wild animals under threat.

An academic [paper](#) titled “*Captivity for Conservation? Zoos at a Crossroads*” was published eight years ago. The paper discusses various issues that speak to the question of whether ‘captivity for conservation’ can be an ethically acceptable goal of the modern zoo. The author reflects on theoretical disagreements involving animal protectionists versus wildlife conservationists. The paper highlights the practical challenges of conservation programmes in zoos, the small percentage of endangered species actually exhibited in zoos, and the disappointing results of reintroduction programs.

The content of the aforementioned paper explains why the ‘Noah’s Ark’ paradigm is being replaced by an alternative ‘integrated approach.’ It explores the changes in the zoo’s core tasks that the new paradigm implies and pays special attention to the changes that would have to be made in zoos’ collection policies: connection with *in situ* projects,

emphasising local species and the local biogeographical region, exchange of animals among zoos and between zoos and wildlife, and a shift towards smaller species.

The author raises an important question about whether the new paradigm will achieve a morally acceptable balance between the costs of animal welfare and the benefits of species conservation.

In 2000, the South African National Research Foundation put out a call for the establishment of research entities, which led to the first tourism niche research entity which was called Socio-Economic Impact of Tourism after which the name was changed to [Tourism Research in Economics, Environs and Society \(TREES\)](#). Their research focus is in line with the goals and objectives of the National Department of Tourism with a focus on economic, environmental and community issues.

TREES support the claim made by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums that coordinated breeding programmes of wild animals in captivity known as [Species Survival Plans](#) serve to guarantee the survival of the species. According to the [content](#) of the paper, *zoos play a role in preserving rare and endangered species of animals hence preserving biodiversity and natural ecosystems throughout the world*. However, the animals held in the zoos have [little to no opportunity](#) for release into the wild.

Based on [extensive research](#) carried out by [Born Free](#) on wild animals in captivity, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1990 identified survival action plans for 1370 species of which 418 were endangered, “the reserve populations of animals kept and bred in captivity are almost never introduced into the wild, especially species non-native to the location to the zoo.” Only 1.4% were identified as being candidates for reintroduction of captive-bred animals.

### **Elephants Do Not Belong in Zoos**

The academic paper titled [Mind and Movement – Meeting the Interests of Elephants](#) published by [Dr Joyce Poole](#) and [Petter Granli](#) confirms that elephants captive in zoos and circuses are plagued by a host of physical and psychological ailments that are not observed among their free-living counterparts. Regardless of the regular health care they might receive, and despite the lack of human predation and the vagaries of drought and disease, captive elephants suffer from obesity, arthritis, foot problems and reproductive and physiological disorders and die at a younger age.

[Elephants in Zoos – A Legacy of Shame](#) is a substantial report which outlines the history and the continuing plight of elephants in zoos across the United States, Canada and Europe, using individual cases the content highlights the impacts of captivity on the physical and psychological health and welfare of individual elephants, the unsustainable nature of existing captive populations, and the impacts of wild capture for captive use on the social stability and conservation of wild elephant populations with the consequences and serious knock-on effects on the wider ecosystems of which they are involved.

The Legacy of Shame Report was researched and published by [Born Free](#) and [endorsed](#) by [Damian Aspinall](#), [Chris Packham CBE](#), [Angela Sheldrick](#), [Dr Cynthia Moss](#), [Dr Winnie Kiiru](#), [David Casselman](#) and [Dr Keith Lindsay](#).



The current [stereotypical behaviour](#) displayed by Charlie the elephant presently held captive at the Pretoria Zoo, which was filmed whilst he was being bombarded with loud music, is extremely concerning. This behaviour is described by behavioural experts as the repetitive, purposeless habit of bobbing his head and swaying incessantly. Neuroscientific research indicates that living in an impoverished stressful captive environment physically damages the brain. Being confined in barren quarters that lack intellectual stimulation or appropriate social contact has negative effects on the cerebral cortex, a part of the brain involved in higher cognitive functions, and leads to dysregulation of the parts of the brain involved with voluntary movements. This is according to [Professor Bob Jacobs](#) in the article [The Neural Cruelty of Captivity – Keeping Large Mammals in Zoos and Aquariums Damages their Brains](#) and the peer-reviewed article [Putative neural consequences of captivity for elephants and cetaceans](#).

### Conclusion

This statement was written in response to the article published in the Mail & Guardian on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2023 titled [The Vital Role of Zoos in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#).

The vision of the Pro Elephant Network is a future in which all elephants can thrive in freedom and dignity in their protected natural habitats as part of naturally functioning and evolving ecosystems.

The mission of the members of PREN is to stop the capture and exploitation of elephants by humans and to advocate for the release of captive-held elephants into the wild. Where freedom and reintegration into the wild are not possible, PREN seeks the best ethical solutions in the most natural surroundings possible. The acceptability and viability of these ethics and conditions are to be evaluated relative to what the individual elephant would be able to experience in the wild.

PREN is a global community of diverse individuals and organisations, united by their common concern for nature, deep association with the natural world and commitment to applying their expertise for the greater good.

### This statement is endorsed by the following PREN members

Owais Awan	Advocate High Court, Islamabad
Suparna Baksi-Ganguly	President and Co-Founder, Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation Center, Bangalore, India
Dr Brett Bard	Veterinarian, South Africa
Dr Jessica Bell Rizzolo	Postdoctoral Researcher, the Conservation Criminology Lab, Dep of Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University
Janey Clegg	Committee Member, SPCA Mutare, Zimbabwe
Megan Carr	Founder, Rhinos in Africa
Lenin Chisaira	Founder, Advocates 4 Earth – Green Law Connect, Zimbabwe
Dr Betsy Coville	Exotic / Wildlife Animal Veterinarian
Dr Harvey Croze	DPhil (Oxon) Collaborating Researcher – Amboseli Trust for Elephants – Kenya
Nomusa Dube	Founder, Zimbabwe Elephant Foundation
David Ebert	Advocate, Founder Director of The Animal Defense Partnership – USA
Stefania Falcon	Co-Founder, Future 4 Wildlife – South Africa
Daniela Freyer	Co-Founder, Pro Wildlife, Germany
Michele Franko	Captive Elephant Caregiver and Advocate – USA



Chief Stephen Fritz	Indigenous Leader, South Peninsula Khoi Council – South Africa
Dr Toni Frohoff	Ethologist and Behavioral Biologist, Founder of TerraMar Research
Dr Marion E. Garai	Elephant Behaviour Specialist - South Africa
Dr Ross Harvey	Environmental Economist, Botswana
Heike Henderson-Altenstein	Co-Founder, Future for Elephants e.V.
Iris Ho	Elephant Policy Consultant and Head of Campaigns and Policy for Pan African Sanctuary Alliance (PASA)
Sangita Iyer	B.Sc., M.A., Founder of Voice for Asian Elephants Society, Nat Geo Explorer and Wildlife Filmmaker
David Kabambo	Founder Director of Peace for Conservation – Wildlife Management - Tanzania
Dr Paula Kahumbu	WildlifeDirect, Kenya
Professor Mohan Kharel	Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal
Nuria Maldonado	Ecologist, Environmental Science, Max Plank Institute
Duncan McNair	Lawyer, CEO of Save The Asian Elephants
Jim Karani	Advocate, Lawyers for Animal Protection in Africa – Kenya
Dr Winnie Kiiru	Founder, Conservation Kenya
Brigitte Kornetzky	President and Founder of Elefanten in Not - Switzerland / India
Professor Bob Jacobs	Neuroscience Researcher – Colorado College – USA
Lynne James	Independent, Elephant Conservation, Zimbabwe
Dr Mark Jones	Veterinarian, Born Free Foundation - UK
<i>Kahindi</i> Lekalhaile	Africa Network for Animal Welfare, Kenya
Dr Smaragda Louw	Director, Ban Animal Trading, South Africa
Linda Masudze	Advocate 4 Earth, Zimbabwe
Varda Mehrotra	Co-Founder, Samayu, A Just World – India
Dr Nurzhafarina Binti Othman	Founder: Seratu Aatai, Elephant Conservation and Research Coordinator at HUTAN-KOCP - Malaysia
Tina Papadopoulou	Biologist, Co-Founder of Friends of Bunka
Sharon Pincott	Elephant Behavioural Specialist, ex-Hwange, Zimbabwe
Michele Pickover	Executive Director, EMS Foundation, South Africa
Bharati Ramachandran	CEO of the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations – India
Ian Redmond OBE	Founder, African Ele-Fund and Elefriends Campaign, Chairman of Ape Alliance and Co-founder of Rebalance Earth
Dr Jan Schmidt-Burbach	Veterinarian, Head of Wildlife Research and Animal Welfare, World Animal Protection International
Mark Stratton	Investigative Journalist, Founder of Friends of Bunka
Dr Liz Tyson	Animal Welfare Law, Programs Director - Born Free USA
Antoinette Van de Water	Director, Bring the Elephant Home, South Africa
Vasanthi Vadi	Trustee of the Federation of Indian Animal Protection Organisations – India
Prof Dan Wylie	Rhodes University, South Africa