

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Technical Bulletin Reprint

Wildland Management Center
School of Natural Resources
The University of Michigan

Effective Conservation Education

By Rika Cecil

The Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, has been experimenting with a variety of educational programs. These programs are designed to intrigue and involve participants, and ultimately to motivate them to become active in conservation efforts.

Drawing connections

At the zoo, conservation education begins at the exhibit site. For some visitors, the zoo is their first introduction to many wildlife species, and to the problems that face these animals in the wild. Naturalistic habitats have been built to help visitors better understand the relationship between wildlife and its natural habitat as well as to benefit the animals. By providing opportunities to view and appreciate animals in naturalistic settings, zoo officials hope that visitors will leave with the desire to help preserve wildlife habitat worldwide.

To encourage conscious recognition of the connection between the animals seen in the zoo and the primary threat to them in the wild—habitat loss—a variety of interactive opportunities are presented at the exhibit site: graphics pose intriguing questions and reward the curious visitor who pursues the answer concealed beneath a panel; a self-guided tour brochure provides more detailed information on the zoo's endangered species; and wildlife wagons with volunteer attendants are stationed at many zoo exhibits to provide visitors with the opportunity to get closer to the animals by touching an elephant's tooth, examining a lion skull, or learning why a particular species is endangered.

Concepts presented at the exhibit site are reinforced during activities in the zoo's Discovery Room. Hands-on

artifacts invite visitors to touch and compare products made from endangered species with benign, synthetic alternatives; for example, a tortoise shell is compared with a plastic tortoise shell comb, and elephant tusk ivory is presented along with its synthetic alternative. Visitors are also encouraged to further explore concepts such as habitat loss through game playing.

On weekends, visitors can view a variety of general wildlife films. With the assistance of a recent Institute of Museum Services grant, a video is being produced which will focus on the endangered species visitors contact at the zoo. The video will allow visitors to witness events and processes not usually seen, but which add additional meaning to the zoo experience. The video will show animals moving and

relating to one another and their habitat, and the interdependence between endangered species and humans. The zoo's role in conservation education and research will be illustrated by examples intended to motivate viewers to become more deeply involved with the zoo as well as with conservation organizations. In this way, the zoo is trying to create an informed citizenry which is supportive of conservation, in general, and the zoo's efforts, in particular.

Greater depth

The zoo also offers an in-depth view of wildlife and its conservation problems in a variety of classes. Children explore the world of birds, or discover how bats hunt at night and why they

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Volunteer docents bring the Woodland Park Zoo's conservation message to students in Seattle area schools.

Education

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are endangered, while adults and teenagers learn to observe and describe animal behavior, or make field trips to discover the relationship between bald eagles and their habitat.

For many of Seattle's children, the first exposure to conservation occurs in their school classroom. Volunteer docents present zoo outreach programs, complete with slide programs, opportunities to touch animal artifacts and other learning activities in local schools. Teachers are encouraged to follow up these programs with activities from the zoo's education packet or by bringing the class to the zoo to reinforce the learning experience.

Teachers also have the opportunity to participate in workshops designed to give them scientific information and practice in teaching wildlife conservation concepts to their students. Co-sponsored by the Washington State Department of Game's Project Wild program, teachers are offered curricula ideas which mix play with

thought and learning. Conservation issues are being integrated into math, history, art, music and science curricula; for example, a counting game emphasizes species loss, a reading exercise includes a story about a pre-industrial society's relationship with animals, and an art activity asks students to design an animal for a specific habitat.

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This year, the Woodland Park Zoo has designated March as Endangered Species Month to create an even greater community awareness of the urgency surrounding endangered species. A special series of programs for zoo visitors and school groups will focus attention on worldwide conser-

vation, the zoo's role in breeding endangered species and promoting habitat preservation, and actions necessary to ensure a future for animals in the wild. A special endangered species guided tour will be offered as well as exhibit talks and animal presentations by keepers.

To be most effective, however, conservation education must be a cooperative effort at the national and international levels. Many zoos are already exchanging successful conservation education programs through professional conferences such as those sponsored by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, and on an ad hoc or personal basis. These exchanges tend to be limited to zoos in western countries, however. Developing countries wishing to establish or expand conservation curricula ideally should be included in efforts to share information and experiences in conservation education.

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A forum for information exchange on endangered species from

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Activities at the exhibit site, such as this Wildlife Wagon, allow visitors to get closer to the animals they observe.

Woodland Park Zoo

Education

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Occasionally, this sharing occurs serendipitously. Since 1981, the Woodland Park Zoo has worked closely with the International Snow Leopard Trust, a Seattle-based conservation organization that supports field research, captive breeding, education programs, and other conservation activities related to snow leopards. In October 1986, zoo education staff and a representative from the Trust presented a conservation education slide show for the Fifth International

Snow Leopard Symposium in India. Following the slide show, the Center of Environmental Education in India invited the zoo and Trust to collaborate with it in a nationwide effort to develop snow leopard conservation education materials. The project is still in the early stages, but the evolving programs have the potential, when implemented, to enhance existing wildlife management gains, and create broad public awareness of conservation goals and efforts.

The transfer of conservation information is not one-way at the Woodland Park Zoo. Zoo keepers have worked in foreign zoos and conducted field research abroad in efforts to learn more about the needs of internationally endangered wildlife. In addition, rare animals have been temporarily exhibited to focus attention on worldwide conservation issues. In 1986, the zoo received a pair of golden monkeys, a species China lists as endangered, for temporary exhibition. For three months, zoo visitors observed the golden monkeys; toured a "China Corridor" of Asian birds and mammals; played Chinese wildlife games in an interpretive tent; sent postcards to China in support of its conservation efforts; and personally pledged to help wildlife.

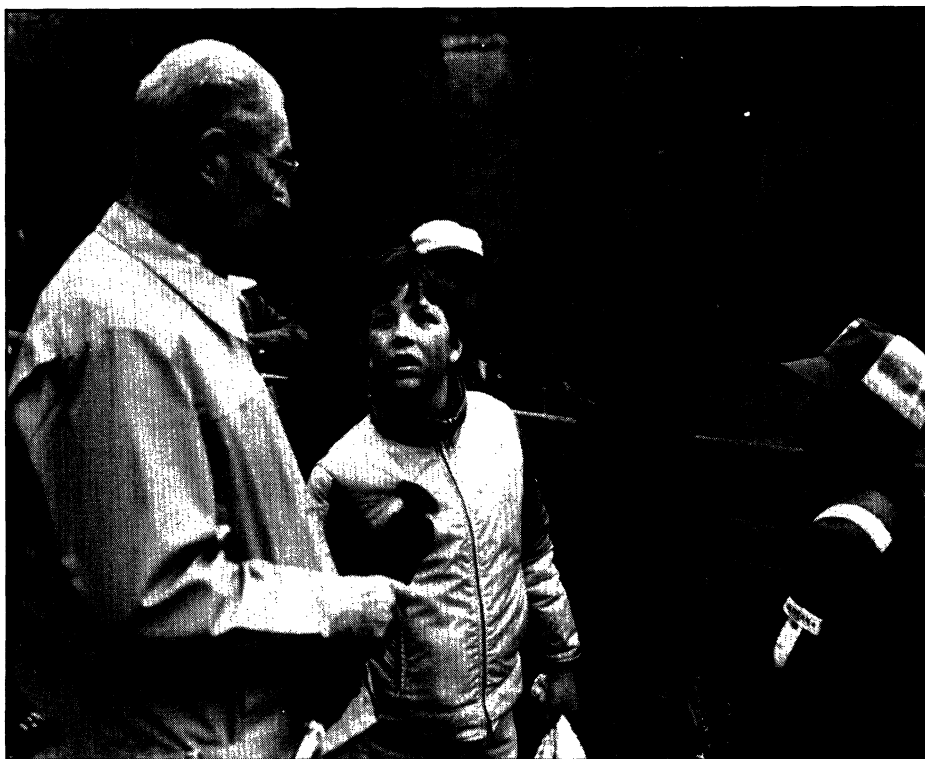


Photo by Laura Eisen

Guided tours give zoo visitors the chance to ask questions and get immediate feedback.

Making a difference

The monkeys have gone, but because of the zoo's commitment to educate itself and its visitors about conservation issues, personal pledges to help conserve wild animals continue to increase. Zoo visitors are having fun learning about conservation, and learning that acting for conservation can be fun and gratifying. With continued effort, present and future decision-makers can be influenced to give animals a future in the wild.

Rika Cecil is the Assistant Curator of Education for the Woodland Park Zoo and Education Coordinator for the International Snow Leopard Trust.

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EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Global Tomorrow Coalition, a national alliance of organizations and individuals comprising over six million Americans, is committed to the belief that better public understanding of worldwide trends in population, resources, environment, and development is needed to enable the United States and other nations to act today to ensure a more sustainable future. The Global Tomorrow Coalition's Education Program concentrates on educating teachers and school children about global environmental issues. Education packets are available for \$5.00, plus \$1.00 for postage and handling, on biological conservation issues, such as tropical forests and biological diversity. For further information write either office: Global Tomorrow Coalition, 1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 1003, Washington, D.C. 20005, or Global Tomorrow Coalition/West, 708 S.W. Third Ave, Suite 227, Portland, Oregon 97204.

TRAFFIC (U.S.A.), the wildlife trade monitoring program of World Wildlife Fund, has a complete education kit available on wildlife trade which includes: an 80-minute slide show, highlighting the facts and facets of wildlife trade; a script to accompany the slide show; an educators guide to wildlife trade; factsheets on trade in live parrots, primates, rhino products, and elephant ivory; and a colorful

brochure, "Buyer Beware", with information for U.S. travelers so they can avoid buying wildlife items abroad that are illegal to bring into the U.S. Cost: \$40.00. To order, write, TRAFFIC (U.S.A.), World Wildlife Fund, 1255 23rd St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037 or phone (202) 293-4800.

ENDANGERED WILDFLOWER CALENDAR

The 1987 *Endangered Wildflower Calendar* is now available from the American Horticultural Society (AHS). The wall calendar features full-color photographs of 16 rare American wildflowers, individual summaries on their status, and general information on endangered plants. To order, send \$6.95 per calendar (\$6.25 for AHS members) to Jeanne Eggeman, AHS, P.O. Box 0105, Mount Vernon, VA 22121. For orders of 3 or more calendars, send \$6.45 for each (\$5.75 for AHS members).

The American Horticultural Society has a list of plants that are considered extinct, and can be obtained by sending a self addressed business-sized envelope and \$1.00 for postage and handling to the Wildflower Rediscovery Project at the same address.

NEW PUBLICATION

World Wildlife Fund-US announces the initiation of a newsletter for individuals concerned with tropical forest conservation. The purpose of *Tropical Forest Conservation* newsletter is to coordinate and communicate the vast amount of pertinent information on tropical forests to the network of people involved in all aspects of tropical forest conservation. The newsletter will contain current news, articles, announcements, and meeting schedules and is intended for individuals working directly for tropical forests conservation.

Contributions of news items, announcements and articles are needed. Articles should be kept between one and three double-spaced pages and many include maps, drawings and photographs. Correspondence should be sent to: Jane MacKnight, World Wildlife Fund-US, 1255 23rd Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

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