



DIGITAL VISION



STOCKBYTE



IMAGE SOURCE

# Should wild animals be used for our entertainment?

THE RECENT DEATH of a trainer, caused by a killer whale, aka orca, at SeaWorld's Shamu Stadium in Orlando, Florida, has reignited the debate about whether animals should be enlisted for entertainment purposes.

Supporters say that modern and humane use of animals in zoos and other entertainment venues is a celebration of the animal world, enhancing our knowledge and appreciation of animals and our bond with them.

Critics argue that animal "entertainers" are frequently abused, but even when they aren't (by our standards), keeping wild animals in captivity denies them a natural life and can ultimately result in tragedy.

What do you think?



Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- <http://www.aza.org/>
- <http://awic.nal.usda.gov>
- [www.SaveJapanDolphins.org](http://www.SaveJapanDolphins.org)
- [www.peta.org](http://www.peta.org)

## YES

### from members:

**Larry Reinfeld**  
Coconut Creek, FL



The animals are being well taken care of, and if they were released they would probably die anyway.

**Amber Garner**  
Lolo, MT



It is neat to have the opportunity to see normally wild animals in a setting where we can have a safe, closer encounter ... and see what they can be taught to do.

**Michael Gibson**  
Pewee Valley, KY



I would rather see an animal in a movie than starved to death or run out of their environment.

## NO

### from members:

**Felice Geoghegan**  
Honolulu, HI



[Captivity is] cruel to the animals [and] we must understand that they are unpredictable in captivity.

**Charles Watson**  
Wheaton, IL



The first time I went to a circus as an adult with my children I felt that it was demeaning to the animals.

**May M. Katz**  
New York City, NY



The celebration of the animal world is never-ending on TV stations and can teach us much more than a trainer tossing a fish at SeaWorld.

### from an expert in the field:



**Jack Hanna** ([www.jackhanna.com](http://www.jackhanna.com)) is the host of the Emmy Award-winning *Jack Hanna's Into the Wild*.

WILD ANIMALS should not *merely* entertain us. There are many animal organizations that may be entertaining to visit, but they have a larger overarching purpose.

Animals in zoos are ambassadors to their cousins in the wild—they educate people about the importance of wildlife. After a visit to the zoo—listening, seeing, smelling—people leave with a newfound understanding and compassion for wildlife. Zoos aren't perfect, but neither is the wild. Zoos are constantly updating animal-care policies and habitats in response to scientific studies and findings.

Critics say the only place animals belong is in the wild, but those boundaries are shrinking each day. Having traveled the world, the only places I consider truly "wild" are Antarctica, parts of the Amazon and some places in Africa. Even in Africa, the "wild" places tend to be national parks with guarded boundaries. Animals face many challenges—habitat loss, poaching, etc. The "wild" is not necessarily the idyllic place people imagine.

The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) accredits animal parks in North America, requiring excellence in animal care and welfare, conservation, education and research. There are more than 200 accredited institutions, and together they donate nearly \$90 million annually to support 4,000 conservation projects in more than 100 countries. Species such as the snow leopard and mountain gorilla have overcome near extinction in part because of zoos' commitment to conservation.

It's true, not every animal exhibition is responsible. If a person finds issue with an animal organization, a report can be filed with the United States Department of Agriculture and they are required to follow up. However, there are many reputable organizations that properly care for their animals that aren't AZA accredited, including some rescue centers and sanctuaries.

Last year 175 million people visited AZA zoos. This makes visiting zoos the largest recreational activity in the country. Yes, people visit to have fun, but animals aren't merely a form of entertainment. Zoos play a critical role in the survival of endangered species, and allow people from all walks of life to experience the animal world. And if zoo visitors learn to love and respect animals, they will undoubtedly advocate for them. [H]

### from an expert in the field:



**Elliot M. Katz** is president and founder of In Defense of Animals ([www.idausa.org](http://www.idausa.org)).

I WRITE AS A veterinarian who has witnessed the behind-the-scenes abuses, cruelties, injuries and deaths of animals, and the more public injuries and deaths of elephants like Tyke, who was shot to death before a horrified public. The larger and more dangerous the animals, such as elephants, lions, tigers, chimpanzees and orcas ("killer whales"), the more likely they will suffer from abuse and cruelty due to totally inadequate and inhumane enclosures. When zoos, circuses and aquariums package animal exploitation and abuse as education and conservation, they are truly misleading the public.

Training powerful and dangerous animals usually involves constant threats of pain. Circuses and zoos often use steel-tipped bull hooks to prod, hook and even beat elephants into compliance, resulting in a lifetime of terror and fear. Zoos keep elephants in pitifully inadequate enclosures that inhibit movement and involve standing on concrete or other hard surfaces, wreaking havoc on feet and joints, which results in painful foot infections and/or crippling arthritis. These are usually masked with high doses of painkillers, resulting in premature and painful deaths often attributed to other causes.

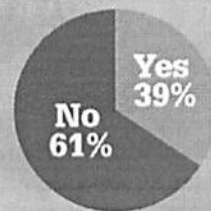
Chimpanzees are "retired" once they reach the age at which their strength becomes dangerous. Retirement for chimpanzees usually means being confined in small cages or roadside zoos, spending the rest of their lives in wretched isolation.

"Killer whales" are violently separated from their families and forced to swim circles in chemical-filled concrete tanks for their entire lives.

Animal protection and education are jeopardized when children are taught to see these animals as caricatures performing ridiculous stunts or as objects to gawk at in cages or poor facsimiles of their natural habitats. A recent study found no evidence that visiting zoos and aquariums increases interest in conservation.

Actually, conservation is hindered, not helped, when animals are kept in small and inadequate enclosures that result in complete boredom and/or abnormal behavior such as repetitive swaying or head bobbing. Treated disrespectfully, these animals are perceived as nothing more than objects or things to make fun of, or to be entertained by, not as individuals that deserve the freedom to live in the wild, in natural preserves or in sanctuaries designed for their needs. [H]

### MAY DEBATE RESULTS: Should judges be elected?



Percentage reflects votes received by May 6, 2010.

### APRIL DEBATE RESULTS: Is obesity a disease?

YES: 23% NO: 77%

Percentage reflects votes received by April 30, 2010. Results may reflect Debate being picked up by blogs.

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